

UPDATE OF THE WPI MENTAL HEALTH IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

January 2023



Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Content Warning: This report of WPI's Mental Health Implementation Team (MHIT) presents an update on resources, programs, and other changes implemented following recommendations of the Mental Health and Well-Being Task Force convened in the wake of student deaths in 2021-2022.

If you or anyone you know may be experiencing distress or thoughts of suicide, call the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988 or text HOME to 741741.

Wellness resources available at WPI can be found on the Be Well Together website: wpi.edu/student-experience/resources/be-well-together.

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A Community Response to Support Mental Health

The work of the **Mental Health and Well-Being Task Force** and **Mental Health Implementation Team** (MHIT), taken holistically, is part of the university's ongoing efforts to foster an environment in which personal well-being is prioritized to allow students, faculty, staff, and others to create for themselves a more balanced experience as members of the WPI community and in their personal lives.

The Task Force was formed in fall 2021 as the university community came together to address student mental health concerns following a series of losses during a national mental health crisis among college students and youth.

According to a Fortune survey of 1,000 college students conducted by [The Harris Poll](#) in June 2022:

- Three in five (60%) college students reported being diagnosed by a professional as having a mental health condition, most commonly anxiety and depression. (This is significantly higher than 48% in the general population reporting similar diagnoses.)
- The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated student mental health problems nationwide:
 - Nearly half reported that their overall mental health worsened since the start of the pandemic.
 - 56% have experienced worsening stress.
 - 53% reported heightened anxiety.
 - 45% cited increased symptoms of depression.

The university aims to support students as they build the critical personal skills that will help them manage the inevitable stressors in life and be successful, however they personally define success. Through the Task Force, the WPI community determined initial actions, detailed in prior reports:

- [Initial Findings and Recommendations of the Mental Health and Well-Being Task Force, Phase One: Students](#)
- [Findings and Recommendations Related to Needs of Special Student Populations](#) (Addendum)
- Findings and Recommendations [Phase Two: Faculty and Staff](#)

Provided in this report are updates on specific actions taken by MHIT, which was formed to act on recommendations put forward by the Task Force. Both groups are composed of students, faculty, staff, and others to ensure the voices and needs of our full community are understood and considered.

WPI is committing \$10+ million in support of mental health and well-being.

WPI has devoted university funds to hire additional staff in the Student Development and Counseling Center, Academic Advising, Student Activities, the Care Team, and other student-facing offices.

We also allocated capital expenditures to create the Center for Well-Being, relocate Student Health Services to Daniels Hall (adjacent to the Center for Well-Being), add counseling space for the Student Development and Counseling Center, launch affinity spaces, and identify gender inclusive restrooms in all campus buildings, among other initiatives.



"I've found that the best mental health support for me is being a part of tight-knit student groups. Some of the people that support me the most I've met through clubs and organizations; they're great to lean on since they can empathize with what I'm going through."

Nick Miragliotta '23

A Phased Approach

The Mental Health and Well-Being Task Force (MHWBTF) was formed in September 2021 by then-president Laurie Leshin to seek input from all members of the community to better understand the intersection of mental health and well-being and the rigors of higher education, and to identify new opportunities to support the WPI community.

The Task Force gathered and analyzed feedback from a series of town halls, listening sessions, and surveys, in addition to other internal and external sources, including an independent review by the **Riverside Trauma Center** a trauma response organization that specializes in support services, such as suicide prevention and intervention. WPI sought insight and input from Riverside in fall 2021; read Riverside's review of WPI's wellness practices here: wpi.edu/sites/default/files/Riverside-Trauma-Center-Review-of-WPI-Protocols.pdf.

This process, led by co-chairs **Jean King, Peterson Family Dean of Arts & Sciences, and Matt Barry, assistant director of the Student Development & Counseling Center**, culminated in presentations to the president and the President's Advisory, as well as three reports Panel (see appendix).

The data gathered pointed to common issues experienced by community members and suggested ways the university could support mental health and well-being while also identifying ways each individual can support their personal self-care and well-being to build individual and community resilience.

In early March 2022, the Task Force transitioned its work to the Mental Health Implementation Team (MHIT), led by **Philip Clay, Senior Vice President for Student Affairs, and Ron Bashista, Director of Emergency Management**, to ensure continued progress on the Task Force's recommendations.

MHIT leadership reviewed the recommendations from the Task Force, along with those from the **Riverside Trauma Center's independent review of WPI's mental health practices**, and input from other community groups including WPI Strong Parents and student leaders representing WPI Advocates. The input and recommendations were synthesized to establish priorities for the initial work of MHIT, with a focus on six tactical sub-sections—each of which included students, faculty, and staff—in addition to liaisons between the overall team and parents:

- Programs, Training, and Services
- Student Life
- First Year Experience
- Academics
- Staff and Faculty
- Communications

The Mental Health Implementation Teams evolved over the spring and summer, with MHIT 1.0 and MHIT 2.0 actions detailed below.



"One thing I preach about most and recommend to others is a balance of work and social life. Here at WPI where the workload can be very stressful, you need an outlet of some sort to keep your mental health in check. Whether that be sports, clubs, Greek life, or going out into the city of Worcester, everybody needs some type of break from their work so they can recharge and be ready to take on challenges head-on. I advise everyone to take a step back if you're struggling; take that day off, reach out to friends, prioritize yourself over your problems, so you can reset and feel more motivated to finish what you started."

Nick Coviello '26

MHIT 1.0 Actions: Completed or In Progress, Spring 2022*

**As initial actions were completed, MHIT sub-sections were reconfigured to focus on additional needs. The list of actions below have been completed or furthered as noted in the "MHIT 2.0" section that follows.*

Programs, Training, and Services

Section Charge

- Determine and coordinate initial well-being/mental health training for the WPI community (with specific offerings for students, faculty, and staff)
- Develop programs for well-being/mental health refresher training for campus constituents
- Facilitate comprehensive programmatic development for the Center for Well-Being (e.g., resource/activity/program offerings, availability and visibility)
- Explore use of technology-based platforms for mental health education and support
- Review confidentiality policies and understandings related to HIPPA & FERPA

Members

Paula Fitzpatrick (co-chair), Director, Center for Well-Being
Matt Barry (co-chair), Associate Director, Student Development & Counseling
Francesca Bernardi, Assistant Professor, Mathematical Sciences
James De Leon, Director, Talent Development, Talent & Inclusion
Rory Flinn, Assistant Dean, Graduate Studies
Diana Gurske, Nurse Practitioner, Health Services
Dana Harmon, Director, Physical Education, Recreation & Athletics
Zoe Januszewski '22
Caitlin Keller, Senior Instructional Designer, Academic Technology Center/Morgan Center
Charlie Morse, Associate Dean, Dean of Student Wellness (see page 12)
Emma Raven '24
Julia Ryan, PhD Student

Key Accomplishments

- Koru Mindfulness Meditation course offered for PE credit in Spring 2022 and scheduled each term AY22-23 year. Renaming of Physical Education (PE) requirement to Wellness and PE requirement was approved starting in AY 2023-24 to support expansion of wellness offerings for credit.
- Director, Associate Director, Office Services Coordinator, and Peer Well-Being Ambassadors hired for Center for Well-Being.
- Launched a new group-counseling workshop series for trans students in Spring 2022.
- Applied for Garrett Lee Smith (GLS) Suicide Prevention Grant submitted through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (Grant was not received this cycle.)
- Partnered with **ProtoCall**, a 24-7 emergency on-call counseling service, **WellTrack**, a wellness promotion and mood tracker app/service, and **The Shrink Space**, a referral service providing students and the SDCC with off-campus referrals to private therapists who specialize in college mental health.
- The Center for Well-Being Space Planning Committee, in collaboration with architectural design firm Lamoureux Pagano Associates|Architects (www.lpaa.com), developed the programming model and plans for the CWB space; construction began in May 2022 and the CWB opened in the fall.

Student Life

Section Charge

- Identify programmatic opportunities for increased community-wide social engagement
- Improve effectiveness of current student-centric programs/services (identify/address shortcomings, coordinate new offerings)
- Identify and coordinate improvements to student quality-of-life programs (peer-to-peer engagement, student-faculty engagement, club support, events).
- Identify and coordinate specialized training for Residential Advisors and student leaders

Members

Emily Perlow, Associate Dean of Students (co-chair)
Arnold Lane, Director of Multicultural Education and Community Engagement (co-chair)
Eric Beattie, Vice President of Campus Facilities Planning (ad hoc member)
Colleen Callahan-Panday, Director of International Student Life
Matthew Foster, Director of Residential Services
Mia-Kay Fuller, Assistant Director of Gender Equity and Sexuality
Alexse LaGuerre '25
Levi Prudhomme, Assistant Director of Operations – Graduate Admissions
Brianna Ross, Director of Advancement
Gaby Rovi, PhD Student
Blaise Schroeder '23
Christine Ziev, Associate Director of Student Activities

Key Accomplishments

- Expanded housing at South Village and utilized Student Center at South Village for programming space, social lounges, and dining options.
- Continued ongoing assessment of campus restroom accessibility to increase the number of available all-gender restrooms in academic buildings.
- Incorporated student voices into the MHIT strategy through three drop-in office hours and hosting a three-hour Student Resource Guide Hackathon (which became [Gompei's Guide to WPI](#)).
- Comprehensively reviewing and updating student leader job expectations, training, and professional development.
- Initiated new staff hires for an Assistant Director of Student Activities (who began in May 2022) and an Assistant Director for Religion and Spiritual Life (who began in July 2022).



"When I am struggling with my mental health, I have a few different strategies to help heal or manage. Most importantly, I connect with friends, especially if I feel like I don't want to. Friends always make my day better. I also go to therapy, try to make space for my self, temporarily change my expectations for myself (both work-wise and at home), and I try to give myself the grace I need. I also find doing something nice for someone else or doing something creative (or both combined) can lift my mood."

**Zoe Reidinger,
Biomedical Engineering**

First Year Experience

Section Charge

- Develop a standard First Year experience to facilitate the transition from high school to college and position new students for academic success and personal well-being.
- Review Physical Education requirement and adapt to provide offerings related to mental health and personal well-being. Coordinate skill development offerings for academic success and time management.
- Enhance peer-mentoring program for new students.
- Coordinate offerings for preventative behavioral health support/education.
- Expand New Student Orientation to include more opportunities for social engagement/relationship building, as well as targeted life-skills and mental health training.
- Assess/adjust introductory and foundational STEM course offerings (to include academic support systems associated with these courses).

Members

Paul Reilly, Assistant Dean, Student Success (co-chair)
Christine Sharry, Assistant Dean, Student Activities (co-chair)

Academics Subsection

- George Heineman, Associate Professor, Computer Science
- Greg Lewin, Assistant Teaching Professor, Robotics Engineering
- Anita Mattson, Professor and Department Head, Chemistry/Biochemistry
- Sarah Olson, Professor and Department Head, Mathematical Sciences
- Doug Petkie, Professor and Department Head, Physics
- Oamfah (Faith) Suwannapong '24

Programming Subsection

- Wes Boucher, Assistant Director, Academic Advising
- Paula Fitzpatrick, Director, Center for Well-Being
- Brendan Griffiths, Assistant Director, Student Success, Graduate Studies
- Dana Harmon, Director, Physical Education, Recreation & Athletics
- Rachael Heard, Director of Academic Programming and Student Transition, Academic Advising
- Amy Beth Laythe, Senior Associate Director, Residential Services
- Brynne MacWilliams '25

Key Accomplishments

- Re-structured New Student Orientation with a schedule for incoming students to help highlight what to expect from their WPI experience and created more opportunities to interact with peers, staff, and faculty, while learning about campus resources.
- Created a new, day-long on-campus welcome experience for incoming students: First Year Experience Days (on campus and virtually) will give the incoming class and their parents/champions ways to engage with resources and learn what to expect as new members of the WPI community.
- Expanded late-night and weekend programming to provide substance-free alternatives for students to socialize and engage outside of the classroom on Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday evenings.



"I've found that nature and spending time outside walking in Worcester help when I'm anxious or stressed. Taking a break from work and spending time by yourself is so important to avoid burnout."

Robert Brodin '23

- As part of the First Year Welcome Experience, the Summer Transition Assistant position (a leadership role for current WPI students) has been created to greet incoming classes at their welcome experience days and partner with them for the summer to provide personalized peer-level support.
- Virtual peer tutoring to be offered by Academic Resources Center (ARC) tutors throughout E1 and E2 Summer 2022 terms.

Academics

Section Charge

- Determine a coherent, cohesive structure for defining “academic success” at WPI that accounts for healthy work/life balance (e.g., overall course load, individual course workload, overarching course flexibility)
- Establish policies to recognize and operationalize practices to relieve academic pressure
- Improve academic advising at the department-level
- Identify and coordinate specialized “best practices” training for faculty (including professional development for inclusive teaching methods and student well-being maintenance)
- Conduct calendar review to establish opportunities for campus-wide periods of rest/reflection

Members

Joe Cullon, Professor of Teaching, Humanities & Arts (co-chair)*

Art Heinricher, Dean of Undergraduate Studies (co-chair)*

Steve Kmiotek (co-chair), Professor of Practice, Chemical Engineering

Scott Barton, Associate Professor, Humanities and Arts; Chair of Committee on Advising and Student Life

Maya Ellis '23

Cherise Galasso, Associate Director of Athletics, Senior Women’s Administrator

Laura Kenney, Director Academic Resource Center

Sam Levitan '24

Dave Medich, Associate Professor, Physics; Committee on Graduate Studies & Research

Sarah Stanlick, Assistant Professor, Department of Integrative and Global Studies; Director, Great Problems Seminar

Robbie Starr, Grad student (member WPI Advocates)

Danielle Upton '22

**Dean Heinricher stepped down from MHIT to assume the duties of Interim Provost; Professor Cullon was then added to the section.*

Key Accomplishments:

- Worked closely with students, faculty, and staff to address the Task Force recommendation that campus-wide periods of rest and reflection be built into the academic calendar. The 2022-23 calendar, proposed by students on MHIT, included at least one of these days in each term.
- Created Marketplace of Ideas (later renamed Educators’ Exchange) for faculty to share best practices to reduce academic pressure; developed as an opportunity to share ideas, best practices, and learnings of what is helpful for students and achievable for faculty.
- Piloting new Testing Center (in addition to Exam Proctoring Center) for students who need to make up exams.
- Faculty Governance Committee (Committee on Advising and Student Life/CASL) working on identifying excellent advisors. CASL is also developing examples of “successful” student schedules that incorporate study time, meals, exercise/wellness breaks, and more.
- Early Warning Survey (piloted in 2022 summer courses) to identify initial signs of concerns.

Staff and Faculty

Section Charge

- Assess wellness benefits currently available to employees and create ways to promote and encourage usage
- Establish forum for staff voice
- Explore ideas for employee connection and relationship building on campus Identify additional ways to reward and engage employees through benefits and total rewards
- Identify additional ways

Members

Hilary Clark, Assistant Vice President, Talent Operations (co-chair)
Jagan Srinivasan, Associate Professor, Biological Science (co-chair)
Patricia Barrows, Associate Controller
Angela Incollingo Rodriguez, Assistant Professor, Psychological & Cognitive Sciences
Jagannath Jayachandran, Assistant Professor, Aerospace Engineering
Purvi Shah, Associate Professor, Marketing
Colleen Shaver, Director, Robotics Resource Center
Leigh Sjogren, Executive Director, Strategic Donor Outreach
Ali Yousefi, Assistant Professor, Computer Science

Key Accomplishments

- In collaboration with the Inclusive Culture Committee, established a [Staff Council](#) that will represent the voice of non-union staff on campus and will serve as an advocate to support the interests and needs of staff, while supporting the mission, values, and strategic goals of WPI. Nine council members were elected in fall 2022; nine more will be elected in spring 2023.
- Launched comprehensive review of compensation, including engaging an external consultant, involving staff, updating job descriptions, benchmarking and salary analysis (FY23-24)
- Currently conducting a comprehensive review of benefits through an inclusive lens including health, tuition, parental leave, retirement, and beyond
- Increasing communication and raising awareness of existing wellness offerings including Tufts Living Well, understanding EAP benefits, etc.; restarting Healthy Herd initiatives including walking challenge and lunchtime yoga. Updated benefits website to bring forward wellness benefits currently available to employees, regardless of participation in Tufts.
- To support wellness and balance, established summer hours for 2022, reinforcing remote/flexible work policy and training for managers, establishing email protocol and meeting etiquette (i.e., ending meetings early to allow for breaks between them).
- Establish “employee social” event as part of campus Wellness Days.



“I always find myself de-stressing with bullet journaling because it not only holds me accountable, but serves as a place where I can write down everything I’m thinking about...it’s also helped me practice contentment, serving as a daily gratitude log to remind myself of all the things I have to be grateful for.”

Jacquelyn Lopez '23

Communications

Section charge

- Develop communications campaign to increase visibility/awareness of mental health/well-being programs and services
- Engage students to determine best platforms for timely, effective communications to student population
- Develop communication platforms regarding well-being resources/ initiatives that are centralized, accessible, and easily maintained
- Embed communications specialists in other sections to assist with targeted communication requirements
- Provide communications support to entire MHIT

Members

Alison Duffy, Executive Director, Strategic Communications, Marketing Communications (co-chair)

Diana Fiorentino, Internal Communications Manager, Marketing Communications (co-chair)

Veronica Brandstrader, Director, Project & Change Management, Information Technology

Josh Debare '23

Sheila Georger, Assistant Vice President, Marketing Communications

Alicia Howell-Munson, graduate student

Julia Quinn-Szcesuil, Associate Director, Content Strategy, Marketing Communications

Matt Resmini '24

Key Accomplishments

- Raising awareness of WPI's commitment(s) to mental health and community well-being while helping to destigmatize mental illness
- Reaching and engaging audiences with ongoing, consistent, informative, and transparent messaging related to MHIT efforts and action plans and outcomes
- Working to ensure mental health and well-being messaging across campus remains relevant and timely
- Educating the WPI community on the wellness-related resources available to them and ease the process by which these resources are found and utilized
- Continuing to assess ideal communications strategies to ensure members of the WPI community are connected and informed



"You are a piece of this beautiful puzzle of a WPI community. Even if you don't know where you fit in, the puzzle will never be complete without you. It's never too late to focus on you, to ask for help, or to search for the gap in our puzzle where you belong."

Robbie Oleynick '24

Centering on Wellness

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, WPI had begun to see an increase in intensity and severity of graduate and undergraduate student mental health needs, based on the university's own data and its attention to and participation in national assessments, including those from the [Healthy Minds Network](#) and the [American College Health Association \(ACHA\) National College Health Assessment \(NCHA\)](#).

In addition, the Care Team (see sidebar), established in 2006 and coordinated through the Dean of Students Office to support students, had been tracking a year-over-year increase in the number of students needing support and noted a more dramatic increase during the COVID-19 pandemic. The team, which meets weekly throughout the academic year, has seen 74 percent more reports, from 973 cases in 2020-2021 to 1,755 in 2021-2022. **A full-time Care Team case manager** was hired in Winter 2022 to address this increase.

The WPI Center for Well-Being

Amid these growing concerns, the university incorporated efforts to more pointedly support mental health and well-being through its 2021-2026 [Strategic Plan, Lead With Purpose](#). In particular, the plan sought to “take a holistic and inclusive approach to elevate student well-being across academic and co-curricular experiences, including launching the **WPI Center for Well-Being**.”

The new Center for Well-Being opened informally on campus in fall 2022 in Daniels 102 and includes a welcome desk staffed by Peer Well-Being Ambassadors, a wellness hub with a restorative water wall and hospitality station for rest or connection, a programming room for hosting wellness activities (such as meditation or yoga), a rest and recovery room equipped with restorative content, and staff offices.

Led by inaugural Director [Paula Fitzpatrick](#), the Center will apply evidence-based practices to promote well-being for students and the broader WPI campus community, recognizing the importance of faculty and staff in creating, maintaining, and modeling a healthier environment for all.

The Center falls under the purview of [Charlie Morse](#), who in Fall 2022 was appointed **Dean of Student Wellness**, a position created to align the university's holistic vision and its resources for health and well-being on campus. As dean, Morse also oversees Student Health Services, the Office of Accessibility, and the Student Development and Counseling Center. He was previously the Associate Dean and Director of Student Counseling Services and led Health Services in the early days of the pandemic—building a strong team focused on student health and public health—when the former Health Services director retired.

The Care Team

The WPI Care Team meets weekly to troubleshoot issues faced by students, from a sprained ankle or roommate issues to missed assignments/classes and mental health concerns. The dedicated team—made up of some three dozen professionals from student-facing offices and coordinated by Lauren Buffone, LISCW, in the new position of full-time case manager—is alerted to a student in need through faculty, coaches, roommates, friends, staff, parents, or others—or via the [I'm Concerned About a Student form](#). The Care Team determines a plan to connect the student to the appropriate support systems to help them manage the issue.

The team includes representatives from nearly every student-facing office:

- Academic Advising, Student Activities (including Greek Life), Residential Services, Student Aid and Financial Literacy,
- Registrar, Global Experiences Office, Graduate Studies, Undergraduate Studies, Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education (ODIME), Athletics,
- International House, SWEET (Supporting WPI through Effective and Equitable Teamwork) Center,
- Office of Accessibility Services, Campus Police, Physical Education and Recreational Athletics, and the Student Development and Counseling Center.

[Read more here.](#)

A Full Suite of Wellness

To better co-locate services, the Student Development and Counseling Center has added counseling space adjacent to the CWB in Daniels Hall. In addition, Student Health Services has also been moved to Daniels Hall, creating a full suite to support the holistic wellness of students and the campus community. An official ribbon cutting is scheduled for late January 2023.

Wellness Days

Wellness Days have been built into the academic calendar as days to reflect, relax, reconnect, and reenergize as individuals and as a campus community.

Coordinated by the Center for Well-Being, Wellness and Community Days will have a community focus and have more programming to allow the community to come together, while Wellness and Rest Days will have a rest focus and be more passively programmed to allow individuals to rest or socialize as they see fit. These are days for listening to and connecting with each other—there will be no classes, no assignment due dates, no non-critical lab work, and no meetings held on these days.

The [Wellness Days](#) webpage has further details, including how community members can propose an activity.

See the appendix for a list of recent stories about student-facing offices and community supports.

Wellness Days for AY22-23

- September 23, 2022: Wellness and Community Day
- November 7, 2022: Wellness and Community Day
- December 13, 2022: Wellness and Rest Day
- February 1, 2023: Wellness and Community Day
- February 24, 2023: Wellness and Rest Day
- March 28, 2023: Wellness and Community Day



"I was raised to be a giver, but sometimes this drains me and affects my mental health. In moments of stress, I find relief through self-reflection, my favorite music, and baking sweets."

Zoe Januszewski '22

MHIT 2.0: March through December 2022

To further infuse mental health and well-being into all aspects of campus life, the Mental Health Implementation Team subsections were restructured as MHIT 2.0 in September 2022 led by **Steve Kmiotek**, Professor of Practice, Chemical Engineering; **Rachel LeBlanc**, Associate Vice President, Strategic Initiatives; and **Charlie Morse**, Dean of Student Wellness.

MHIT 2.0 continues the work of MHIT 1.0 to operationalize numerous recommendations from the Mental Health and Well-Being Task Force. Additional actions were prioritized, and other members of the community were asked to play a role in their implementation.

LeBlanc monitors and support all budgetary requests and operational and logistical needs, as she had while serving as the MHIT **Strategic Initiatives Liaison**.

In addition, **Stephanie Pasha**, Assistant Vice President of Constituent Engagement Strategy, serves as Parent Liaison and meets regularly with WPI Strong, a group of parent volunteers, to help keep families apprised of the university's resources and engaged in supporting their students.

MHIT 2.0 is structured similarly to MHIT 1.0 with five tactical sub-sections, each of which includes students, faculty, and staff representatives:

- Student Life
- Community Input, Engagement, and Assessment
- Mental Health, Student Support, and Well-Being
- Faculty and Academics
- Communications

MHIT 2.0 Actions: Completed or In Progress, March through December 2022

Some actions listed here were begun under MHIT 1.0 and were launched, completed, and/or enhanced under MHIT 2.0.

Student Life

Section Charge

To continue to support student life outside the classroom, including a focus on DEI&B (diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging), financial support resources, residential living experience, campus programming, and campus systems.

Members

Arnold Lane, Director of Multicultural Education and Community Engagement (co-chair)

Christine Sharry, Assistant Dean, Student Activities (co-chair)

Greg Cesar, Associate Director, Graduate Studies

Shawn Copeland, Assistant Director, Residential Services

Geoffrey Garsson '23

Brynne MacWilliams '25

Blaise Schroeder '23

Key Accomplishments March through December 2022

- Opened South Village Student Center featuring additional dining options and gathering spaces.
- Opened two identity centers—Center for Black Excellence and Lavender Lounge in the Rubin Campus Center.

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- Digital displays installed in residential communities to enhance knowledge around campus events.
 - Identified/labeled/mapped gender-inclusive restrooms in all academic buildings on campus.
 - Exploring affinity housing on campus for diverse student populations.
 - Creating a new online system to support students who have name changes for a more streamlined process.
 - Added crisis support information to the back of new WPI IDs for quick reference.
 - Opened community food pantry in partnership with THRIVE.
 - Enhanced education on financial support and resources for all students.
 - Created programming opportunities around events to de-stress separate from the Wellness Days.
 - Designed and implemented wellness training for student leaders.
 - Added a Student Activities Office staff member focused on late-night programming to expand offerings; enhanced programming throughout the week.
 - Added a staff member of Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education focused on religion and spiritual life to expand Collegiate Religious Center programs and services.

Real-World Results

- Students and other community members who are experiencing food insecurity have access to the food pantry in partnership with THRIVE.
- Students have access to additional financial support resources including workshops, the Financial Assistance Fund, etc.
- Students have access to new and upgraded lounges and meeting spaces to build community, host affinity programs, and promote socials/events.
- The Center for Well-Being has a physical space on campus for the WPI community featuring rest and recovery rooms along with other amenities and programming.

Current Priorities

- Examining strategies to reduce stress related to the housing selection process and provide clearer communication about break housing for students via departmental communications.
- Developing a plan for safe and accessible all-gender restrooms in every building.
- Exploring a DEI&B training model to include group facilitator educators.
- Identifying ways to provide clear instructions and visibility for student employment.
- Reviewing graduate student access to Student Health Services.
- Providing guidance and support for students looking for Research Assistant, Teaching Assistant, or graduate assistantship positions.
- Creating a programming series for student transitions throughout their time at WPI.
- Exploring how to provide greater knowledge of how to make programs more accessible.

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- Identifying ways for the Career Development Center to promote opportunities and programming to highlight BIPOC/ALANA organizations and businesses.
 - Finding ways to improve publicity of student events to faculty and staff.
 - Exploring office hours for all student-facing departments to ensure immediate access.
 - Assessing whether TechSync meets student needs in regard to student organization management, event promotion, etc.

Also on the Radar

- Reviewing the current accessible transportation options for students to navigate campus.
- Exploring what resources students are using (or desire) to enhance a sense of belonging and increase an understanding of what is happening on campus.
- Exploring an expansion of office hours from student-facing departments to academic departments and other entities on campus.
- Examining space on campus, its utilization and impacts on student life.

Community Input, Engagement, and Assessment

Section Charge

To build community to help ensure that students, faculty, staff, and parents are engaged in supporting the work of MHIT; take the pulse of the community today and focus on developing long-term feedback mechanisms to ensure ongoing sustainability of initiatives.

Members

Kate Bellaud, Director, Campus Visits & Events, Admissions Office (co-chair)
Emily Perlow, Associate Dean of Students (co-chair)
Greg Cesar, Associate Director, Graduate Studies
Hilary Clark, Associate Vice President, Talent Operations, Talent & Inclusion
Paula Fitzpatrick, Director, Center for Well-Being
Susanna Oppong '23
Paul Pacheco '22, PhD '26
Stephanie Pasha, Assistant Vice President of Strategic Donor Outreach, Advancement
Jagan Srinivasan, Professor, Biology & Biochemistry

Key Accomplishments March through December 2022

- Focus group with parents about their communication needs
- Employee connection time during Wellness Days will be ongoing
- Webinars on wellness related topics for parents—two in November, two in February
- Completed Graduate Enrolled Student Survey and are sharing results with stakeholders starting in November
- Ongoing engagement with parents regarding WPI's wellness work
- Meeting with stakeholders to determine wellness metrics and ongoing assessment plans
- Developing a plan to share MHIT progress on an ongoing basis with undergraduate and graduate students
- Hosted a community engagement and feedback poster session in the Rubin Campus Center in December with over 150 attendees

Real-World Results

- The team piloted a very successful employee social during wellness day in November, with 60+ attendees, and is now looking to scale the program to offer this kind of employee connection time for future wellness days.

Current Priorities

- Revamp of parents' website to become a landing page for all parent needs and questions
- Partner with others on campus to develop an assessment strategy to measure culture change as a result of WPI's efforts to improve overall community wellbeing through the addition of wellness measures in the Enrolled Student Survey deploying in March 2023 and in an employee survey deploying in the spring or early fall.
- Work closely with campus partners to focus on staff and faculty engagement, supports, and feedback.
- Engage students in coalition building with the goal of inspiring confidence in work to date and collaborating with student supporters for the ongoing work.

Also on the Radar

- Working on how to transition sustainable strategies for communication, assessment, and engagement to current infrastructure on campus.

Mental Health, Student Support, and Well-Being

Section Charge

To promote the holistic well-being of undergraduate and graduate students through proactive and prevention strategies that build resilience, and to realize WPI's vision for fostering a culture of care for the entire university community.

Members

Paula Fitzpatrick, Director, Center for Well-Being (co-chair)
Paul Reilly, Assistant Dean, Student Success (co-chair)
Matt Barry, Associate Director, Student Development and Counseling
Francesca Bernardi, Assistant Professor, Mathematical Sciences
Wes Boucher, Assistant Director, Academic Advising
Jeannine Coburn, Assistant Professor, Biomedical Engineering
Kalvin Cummings, Assistant Director, Religion and Spiritual Life
Amy Curran, Director, Office of Accessibility Services
James De Leon, Director, Talent Development, Talent & Inclusion
Diana Gurske, Nurse Practitioner, Health Services
Dana Harmon, Director, Physical Education, Recreation & Athletics
Jada Hinds-Williams '23
Caitlin Keller, Senior Instructional Designer, Academic Technology Center
Lori Kendall-Taylor, Senior Assistant Director of Student Success
Maceo Richards '23, MS '24
Julia Ryan, PhD student
Colleen Shaver, Director, Robotics Resource Center

Key Accomplishments March through December 2022

- Opened the Center for Well-Being in Daniels Hall, Room 102/Morgan Wedge
- Launched Kognito for all students, faculty, and staff as part of a comprehensive mental health and suicide prevention education initiative



"The world is a wide, amazing, and beautiful place. The resources at WPI—professors, friends, organizations, projects, and beyond—will help you explore this world if you let them. Jump in, don't be afraid. Stay curious. Stay teachable."

Sam Levitan '24

- Established programming model and implementation plan for Wellness Days.
- Trained students to work in Center for Well-Being as Peer Well-Being Ambassadors and ProjectConnect facilitators
- Offering Koru Mindfulness courses for PE credit for undergraduate students each term and as part of wellness programming for faculty, staff, and graduate students
- Launched ProjectConnect, an evidence-based program that fosters conversation, connection, and community in which, over the course of six weeks, participants discuss a series of thought-provoking questions, complete a mini-connection project, and celebrate together.

Real-World Results

The WPI community demonstrated an impressive commitment to mental health education. A total of 969 employees (75%) and 2,165 undergraduate and graduate students completed Kognito, and the majority (92% of employees and 78% of students) said they would recommend it. In addition, participants reported a significant increase (74% increase for employees, 47% increase for students) in their perception of their ability to recognize when a student is experiencing psychological distress and their confidence in their ability to refer students to mental health support services. (See appendix for detailed Kognito engagement summary.)

Current Priorities

- Determine and coordinate well-being/mental health training for WPI community (with specific offerings for students, faculty, and staff)
- Facilitate ongoing, comprehensive programmatic development of Center for Well-Being (e.g., resource/activity/program offerings, availability, and visibility)
- Explore use of technology-based platforms for mental health education and support to complement in-person programming
- Offer workshops centered on Black students' mental health led by Black mental health professionals and develop and host-specific, culturally responsive wellness programming, including retreats, focused on underrepresented students each term

Also on the Radar

Develop educational opportunities for all members of the WPI community to understand the experiences of the LGBTQIAP+ community, BIPOC/ALANA community, international community, and neurodiverse community.

Faculty and Academics

Section Charge

To help redefine what “academic success” means at WPI; implement policies and procedures to relieve academic pressure; improve academic advising at departmental level; and implement periodic campus-wide breaks.

Members

Joe Cullon, Professor of Teaching, Humanities & Arts (co-chair)
 Robbie Starr '21; MS candidate (co-chair)
 John Sullivan, Professor, Mechanical & Materials Engineering (co-chair)
 Lakeya Almeida, Associate Director, Academic Advising
 Scott Barton, Associate Professor, Arts, Communications & Humanities
 Kim Cosenza, Coach, Field Hockey, PE, Recreation & Athletics
 Maya Ellis '23
 Sam Levitan '24
 Adrianna Niles '25
 Sarah Stanlick, Assistant Professor, The Global School

Key Accomplishments March 2022 through December 2022

- Developed “Educators’ Exchange,” a Teams-based blog for faculty to share best practices, ideas they have tried that worked (or didn’t work!)
- With CASL, developed Advising Best Practices guide for faculty
- Developed First Day/Syllabus guidance document for faculty, including suggestions for relieving academic pressure
- Implemented Make-Up Exam Center (for students who have to miss an exam for illness or other reasons)
- Worked to adjust the academic calendar to include Wellness Days (one Wellness and Community Day and one Wellness and Rest Day per term)
- Recruited MHWB Faculty Champions to help their departments embrace wellness best practices, including community building and enhanced flexibility within courses and in faculty advising and mentoring of students.
- See more at the Morgan Teaching and Learning Center’s Canvas site: canvas.wpi.edu/courses/1046

Real-World Results

- Make-up Exam Center has made it easier for faculty and students to coordinate make-up exams for students who miss an exam because of illness, interviews, conference attendance, or other excused reasons
- Early Warning System Revs 1 & 2 have helped inform what is needed for the system (used in Summer 2022 and Insight)
- Continue to advocate ongoing use of lecture capture technology in classes (currently faculty in more than half of all courses provide regular lecture capture access) as well as Zoom and other supports for students.

Current Priorities

- Assess course material and time-on-task for assignments
- Assess course workload and student assessment of course workload
- Provide support, reward, and recognition for faculty who prioritize academic advising and student and colleague mentoring
 - Evaluating Faculty Annual Report system
- Facilitate conversations among faculty across all academic departments about classroom dynamics, assignments, and course policies to find and remove mental health pressure points
- Continue to expand Educator’s Exchange through a network of Faculty Mental Health and Well-Being Champions

Also on the Radar

- Develop an early-warning system to identify and help students who are struggling academically
 - Based on available data, such as course Canvas sites
 - Evaluating options and constraints, including privacy issues
- Further improve faculty advising and mentoring of students that yield measurable increases in student satisfaction with their faculty advisors

Communications

Section Charge

To support community building, engagement, and well-being through clear, multichannel communications that ensure all audiences are aware of news, resources, opportunities, and activities related to individual and collective wellness; support all other MHIT subsections and campus partners in broadly sharing important information about programs and progress.

Members

Alison Duffy, Executive Director, Strategic Communications, Marketing Communications (co-chair)

Diana Fiorentino, Internal Communications Manager, Marketing Communications (co-chair)

Veronica Brandstrader, Director, Project & Change Management, Information Technology

Josh Debare '23

Jessica Grimes, Executive Director, Content Strategy, Marketing Communications

Stacey Happy, Marketing & Digital Media Program Manager

Matt Resmini '24

Kevin Schultz '23

Key Accomplishments

- Supporting MHIT Subsection communications needs
- Producing biweekly Be Well Together email
- Co-producing [Gompei's Guide to WPI](#) for Student Affairs

Real-World Results

- Reached 91,480 people in the WPI community on social media by sharing stories about mental health and well-being resources and helpful tips for holistic well-being
- Printed and distributed 3,000 copies of *Gompei's Guide to WPI* (also online)
- Maintain a ~50% open rate for students on Be Well newsletter

Current Priorities

- Promoting the WPI Mobile App to share resources & important updates with the community
 - Increase number of push notifications regarding helpful resources and tips
- Utilizing digital platforms to share MHIT updates
- Gathering and sharing positive messages for the students through community voices
- Promoting MH and WB resources through newsletters, social media, mobile app, digital screens
- Promoting *Gompei's Guide to WPI* web presence more broadly

Also on the Radar

- Getting EVERYONE to use the [WPI Mobile App!](#)

Next Steps

The dozens of individuals who served on the Task Force and Mental Health Implementation Teams devoted hundreds of hours toward developing and executing a plan to improve mental health and well-being. The teams' collective achievements and accomplishments have been supplemented heavily by the collaboration of many students, faculty, staff members, parents, alumni, and others from across the community.

This work continues both formally and informally through ongoing dialogue among all constituents, new programs, updated policies and procedures, new or enhanced services, added staff, and resources. MHIT will be thoughtfully phased out in the coming months and, going forward, its work will be integrated and operationalized within existing structures and departments, and via new mechanisms, including an internal advisory board that is to be created. The advisory board will be made up of students, faculty, staff, and others to help ensure a focus on wellness woven into the ways we interact with and care for each other. Information will be shared with the community in the coming months.

Every single student, faculty member, staff member, parent, and alum can play an ongoing role in supporting holistic well-being by practicing self-care and supporting others as they build their own self-care skills as well.

Thank you.



"I have suffered from anxiety for most of my adult life. Talking to a trusted friend and/or therapist is the best method I have found to help work through the difficulties... My anxiety will never disappear but with help I have learned how to live with it. You are not alone, and you are not a burden for needing help."

**Liz Chirico,
University Advancement**

Appendix

Item 1: Reports of the Mental Health and Well-Being Task Force

- [Initial Findings and Recommendations of the Mental Health & Well-Being Task Force, Phase One: Students](#)
- Addendum: [Findings and Recommendations Related to Needs of Special Student Populations](#);
- [Initial Findings and Recommendations of the Mental Health & Well-Being Task Force, Phase Two: Faculty and Staff](#)

Item 2: President's Advisory Panel

- Philip Clay, Senior Vice President for Student Affairs
- Joyce Kline, Chair of the WPI Board of Trustees Committee on Student Affairs
- Laurie Leshin, President (former)
- Charlie Morse, Dean of Student Wellness
- Mark Richman, Secretary of the Faculty
- Wole Soboyejo, Provost

Item 3: Kognito Engagement Summary

Click [here](#) for details about the WPI community's thoughts on Kognito training.

Item 4: Related Articles

Read more about the people, programs, and services available to support mental health and well-being on our campus. Below are articles shared from March through December 2022. Check [wpi.edu/news](#) for more.

Faculty Learn Strategies to Improve Student Well-Being and Academic Success

WPI Herd: January 24, 2023

[wpi.edu/news/faculty-learn-strategies-improve-student-well-being-and-academic-success](#)

Q&A with Mia-Kay Fuller, Assistant Director for Gender Equity and Sexuality

WPI Herd: January 5, 2023

[wpi.edu/news/qa-mia-kay-fuller](#)

Residential Services: A Key to Student Success

WPI Herd, December 8, 2022

[wpi.edu/news/residential-services-key-student-success](#)

Office of Accessibility Services Educates and Empowers Students: Working to Dismantle Stigma and Physical Barriers on Campus

WPI Herd: November 30, 2022

[wpi.edu/news/office-accessibility-services-educates-and-empowers-students](#)

A Q&A with Calvin Cummings: New Assistant Director for Religion and Spiritual Life

WPI Herd, October 27, 2022

[wpi.edu/news/qa-kalvin-cummings](#)

WPI Names Tony Laing, PhD, Assistant Vice President for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

WPI News, October 26, 2022

[wpi.edu/news/wpi-names-tony-laing-phd-assistant-vice-president-diversity-equity-inclusion-and-belonging](#)

Meet WPI's New Director of Title IX, Stanley Horton

WPI Herd, October 12, 2022

[wpi.edu/news/meet-wpi-s-new-director-title-ix-stanley-horton](#)

South Village: Additional Residence Halls and New Student Center Open

WPI Herd, September 14, 2022

wpi.edu/news/south-village-additional-residence-halls-and-new-student-center-open

Charlie Morse Appointed Dean of Student Wellness

WPI Herd, September 8, 2022

wpi.edu/news/charlie-morse-appointed-dean-student-wellness

A Piece of Home Away from Home

WPI Herd, August 30, 2022

wpi.edu/news/piece-home-away-home

Office of Multicultural Affairs Rebrands as the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education (ODIME)

WPI Herd, August 10, 2022

wpi.edu/news/office-multicultural-affairs-rebrands-office-diversity-inclusion-and-multicultural-education

First-Year Welcome Experience: Smoothing the Transition to College

WPI Herd, June 14, 2022

wpi.edu/news/first-year-welcome-experience-smoothing-transition-college

Mental Health and Well-Being Task Force and Mental Health Implementation Team Work to Bring a Culture of Wellness to WPI

WPI Herd, May 19, 2022

wpi.edu/news/mental-health-and-well-being-task-force-and-mental-health-implementation-team-work-bring

WPI's Evolving Mental Health and Well-Being Response

WPI Journal, Spring 2022

wp.wpi.edu/journal/articles/wpis-evolving-mental-health-and-well-being-response

Q&A: Paul Reilly, Assistant Dean of Student Success, on Building Connections

WPI Journal, Spring 2022

wp.wpi.edu/journal/articles/qa-paul-reilly-on-building-connections

Q&A: Jessica Sabourin, Director of Student Aid and Financial Literacy

WPI Herd, April 26, 2022

wpi.edu/news/qa-jessica-sabourin-director-student-aid-financial-literacy

Q&A: Paula Fitzpatrick, Director of the WPI Center for Well-Being

WPI Herd, April 14, 2022

wpi.edu/news/qa-paula-fitzpatrick-director-wpi-center-well-being

Q&A: Arnold Lane, Jr., Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs (now the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education)

WPI Herd, April 7, 2022

wpi.edu/news/qa-arnold-lane-jr



"The early days of the pandemic threw me into a very dark headspace. Thankfully, I have a trusted group of friends that I share everything with. They were the first to realize I was in serious trouble and urged me to call my prescriber. Always keep lines of communication open with someone, especially when life feels overwhelming."

**Sharon Robsky,
Information Technology**

Finding Faith: WPI's Campus Chaplains Support the WPI Community

WPI Herd, March 29, 2022

wpi.edu/news/finding-faith-wpi-s-campus-chaplains-support-wpi-community

WPI Cares: The Care Team's Important Role in Supporting Students

WPI Herd, March 17, 2022

wpi.edu/news/wpi-cares-care-team-s-important-role-supporting-students

Reconnecting with WeConnect Day

March 16, 2022

wpi.edu/news/reconnecting-weconnect-day

Mental Health & Well-Being Task Force: Addendum and Faculty and Staff Findings

WPI Herd, March 14, 2022

wpi.edu/news/announcements/mental-health-well-being-task-force-addendum-and-faculty-and-staff-findings

Community Mental Health: Putting Feedback and Recommendations into Action

WPI Herd, February 24, 2022

wpi.edu/news/announcements/community-mental-health-putting-feedback-and-recommendations-action



"One of the things that I admire most about the WPI community is the immediate sense of family I've found here. Whether it be my field hockey teammates, my sorority family, or people that I have classes with, WPI has provided me with an incredible support system. These people have gotten me through some incredibly difficult days, and I wouldn't be where I am without them. They are a consistent source of energy, love, and happiness, and I'm ridiculously grateful for all they have given me in my time at WPI."

MC Shea, '23



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