

WELLNESS, ENGAGEMENT & BELONGING SYMPOSIUM

October 15, 2026

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

DR. REBECCA KENNEDY

Creating the Conditions for Wellbeing: A Health Promoting University Approach

Dr. Kennedy serves as the Assistant Vice President for Student Health and Wellbeing at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. There she provides administrative leadership to six departments: Assessment and Planning, Student Health Services, Student Counseling Services, Wellness Promotion, Veteran's Services and University Recreation and holds a faculty appointment in Psychology.

In addition to multiple leadership roles at UAB she is the co-chair of the International Health Promoting Campuses Network and was the inaugural chair for the US Health Promoting Campuses Network. She is also the co-author of a chapter entitled, "Well-being in Higher Education: Evidence- and Policy-based Strategies to Enhance the Well-being of People, Place and Planet" that was published in early 2023 and the December 2024 article, "The Okanagan Charter to improve wellbeing in higher education: shifting the paradigm" in *Frontiers in Education*. Further, she is the only American to earn authorship on the Limerick Framework for Action.

Dr. Kennedy is an expert in the application of settings-based health promotion on college campuses and frequently provides training to colleges and universities across the United States of America.

DR. ANGELA INCOLLINGO RODRIGUEZ

Leveraging the Science of Stress to Build Resilience and Avoid Burnout

Angela Incollingo Rodriguez is an associate professor of Psychology and Neuroscience here at WPI and she also directs the Stigma Eating & Endocrinology Dynamics (SEED) Lab.

Dr. Rodriguez's research program harnesses an integrated biopsychosocial approach to identify factors that predict and drive overall health and health inequity. Her mixed-methods research occurs at the intersection of social phenomena (such as weight stigma), biomarkers (such as cortisol and inflammation), and psychological factors (such as stress and behavior change). Core themes throughout her work include eating and exercise, stigma and discrimination, pregnancy and maternal health, and chronic pain.

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AGENDA:

8:15 – 8:45 a.m. Registration & Light Breakfast. Enjoy healthy refreshments and check in. Room: Unity 400

8:45 – 9:00 a.m. Welcome Message by President Grace Wang. Room: Unity 400

9:00 – 10:00 a.m. Morning Keynote Address. Room: Unity 400

Creating the Conditions for Wellbeing: A Health Promoting University Approach

Speaker: Dr. Rebecca Kennedy, Assistant Vice President for Student Health and Wellbeing- University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Description: Colleges and universities have invested significantly in programs and services designed to support student and employee wellbeing. These investments are essential, but what if our greatest opportunity to improve wellbeing is to broaden our focus? What if, alongside providing support, we intentionally examine and shape the conditions in which people learn, work, connect, and live?

This keynote introduces the Health Promoting University approach as a framework for broadening our impact, from supporting individuals to creating the conditions for wellbeing across the entire university community.

We will explore how wellbeing can be embedded into institutional culture, built environments, policies, procedures, and everyday practices, moving from isolated initiatives toward collective action and shared responsibility.

The session will challenge the WPI community to consider a larger question: What would we do differently if we understood every institutional decision as an opportunity to create the conditions for people and communities to thrive?

10:00 – 10:30 a.m. Colleague Connection Time- Kindness Rocks & WellSort Table.

Room: Unity 4th Floor Hallway

10:30 - 11:15 a.m. Breakout Workshop Sessions A or B

Workshop A: *Ayurveda 101: Building a Nourishing Daily Rhythm for Fall*

Facilitator: Diana Fiorentino. Room: Unity 405

Description: As autumn brings cooler temperatures and changing routines, Ayurveda offers simple, grounding practices to support balance and wellbeing. This introductory 45 minute session explores how seasonal foods, digestion, hydration, herbs, movement, and daily self-care routines can help cultivate stability, resilience, and nervous system balance during the fall season. The program includes practical guidance and brief experiential practices that promote calm, focus, and grounding, leaving participants with easy tools they can incorporate into everyday life.

Workshop B: Framing your Work Outlook

Facilitator: Sabrina Rebecchi, LMHC (SDCC Director) & Matthew Barry. Room: Unity 420

Description: This presentation will help participants explore their core values and think about how those values can guide their everyday work. Using a simple exercise adapted from ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy), we will build self-awareness, discuss the idea of work-life balance, and challenge each other to take a small step outside of their comfort zone through a social connection exercise. The goal is for everyone to leave with a clearer sense of what matters to them and one practical action they can take to live more in line with their values.

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Agenda continued

11:15 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Breakout Workshop Sessions C or D

Workshop C: *WellSort- Sort Out What's Most Important for Your Wellbeing*

Facilitator: Jessica Greher Traue, WellSort. Room: Unity 420

Description: You spend your days showing up for students and colleagues, but this session is about showing up for yourself.

In this hands-on workshop, Jessica Greher Traue, WellSort's Director of Campus Partnerships, will guide you through a digital card sorting and reflection activity to help you clarify what matters most for your wellbeing right now.

You'll sort cards across eight dimensions of wellbeing, including emotional, physical, social, financial, and occupational, and watch your top priority come into focus. Then you'll turn that priority into a small, realistic action plan and join colleagues in an honest conversation about what it means to care for yourself while taking care of others.

You'll leave with a clear picture of your priorities, a concrete next step, and a shared language for talking about wellbeing with the WPI students you support, who have their own version of WellSort. *Please bring a tablet or laptop.*

Workshop D: *Zentangle - Mindful Mark Making*

Facilitator: Monique Oles. Room: Unity 405

Description: Unwind and recharge with a guided, calming Zentangle session. You'll be led step by step through simple, structured patterns that turn repetitive strokes and lines into a restorative, focused drawing practice—no artistic experience needed, and all materials are provided.

12:00 – 1:15 p.m. Lunch Break (preregistration required) & Center for Well-Being Incubator for Well-Being Research and Innovation (IWell) Posters. Room: Unity 400

IWell Posters:

Name: Tsitsi B Masvawure, Ph.D.

Title: *Thriving or barely surviving? An exploratory study to identify facilitators and barriers to students' social and emotional wellbeing during IQPs abroad and the effectiveness of students' social support networks*

Abstract: IQPs typically require WPI students to spend two months off-campus, often in a foreign country, working on a sponsor-led project. This immersive experience presents invaluable opportunities for personal growth—emotional and social—and yet can also be tremendously stressful. This exploratory study will employ the socio-ecological model to identify facilitators and barriers to students' emotional and social wellbeing during IQPs abroad, including examining if/how students' social support networks help them thrive and cope during IQPs.

Name: Soroush Farzin, Ph.D.

Title: *Interference Patterns: A Resonant Space* (Interactive Art Installation)

Abstract: Interference Patterns: A Resonant Space is an immersive, interactive art installation designed to raise awareness about mental health and well-being through movement, and sensory experiences. The installation creates a dynamic space that evolves in response to participants' engagement, emphasizing the role of dialogue, collective relaxation, and environmental stimuli in mental well-being. Using projections, motion sensors, and ambient soundscapes, the installation visually and sonically shifts between fragmented and cohesive states, representing isolation and connection. Integrated stations will provide interactive mental health resources, guiding participants toward reflection and awareness. The project involves student collaboration in its design, construction, and evaluation, fostering a sense of ownership and shared learning.

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Agenda continued

Name: Snehalata Kadam, Ph.D.

Title: *Using the biomechanics of yoga poses as a framework for understanding mechanics in physics*

Abstract: *Biomechanics is essential for understanding the principles of human movement and structure.*

Combining physics, engineering, and biology reveals how gravitational forces interact with muscles, bones, and joints. In today's rapidly evolving world, interdisciplinary studies have become crucial for students to develop a broad, adaptable skill set. Integrating multiple disciplines enables students to solve complex problems, enhance critical thinking and foster innovation. In this proposal, we propose using two-dimensional force plates to analyze yoga movements, which can provide valuable insights into balance, stability, center of mass and weight distribution during different poses. By employing active learning techniques that connect body movement with physics principles, we will dismantle barriers to learning, enabling students to experience a new dimension of wellness that integrates STEM education and physical activity. Our tagline is "Embrace biomechanics to unlock your potential"!

1:15-2:00 p.m. Afternoon Keynote Address. Room: Unity 400

Leveraging the Science of Stress to Build Resilience and Avoid Burnout

Speaker: Dr. Angela Incollingo Rodriguez, Associate Professor, Social Science & Policy Studies; Program Director; Psychology at WPI.

Description: Dr. Incollingo Rodriguez will discuss the science behind our understanding of stress and how we can use that knowledge to build resilience, cope effectively, and recover from stress so as to avoid burnout and its consequences for health and wellbeing.

2:00 - 2:45 p.m. Afternoon Workshop Sessions E or F

Workshop E: *It's Complicated: Navigating the Supervisor-Supervisee Relationship*

Facilitator: Roxanne Armbruster & Stan Horton. Room: Unity 405

Description: Explore one of the most important workplace partnerships. Through research, real-world examples, practical strategies, and a bit of humor, participants will learn how supervisors and employees can build trust, communicate effectively, manage expectations, navigate conflict, and create productive working relationships.

Workshop F: *Yoga*

Facilitator: Catherine Flayhan. Room: Unity 420

Description: This session of yoga is for all levels, from beginners with some experience to seasoned practitioners. Options and modifications are provided to help each pose work for your body. Discover how energy flows through the body with yoga and meditation, in a practice designed to support and inspire all levels.

2:45 – 3:00 p.m. Break

3:00 – 4:00 p.m. Employee Meeting. Facilitator: Staff Council. Room: Unity 400

4:00 – 4:30 p.m. Closing Reflections & Thank You with W.E.B. Planning Committee. Smoothie Bar.
Room: Unity 400

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Thank you to the W.E.B. team
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Paula Fitzpatrick
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