



OUTPUT 3

Multi-language Toolkit: Understanding Student Wellbeing and Mental Health Issue Safeguarding and Support (Toolkit 1)

Partners on Embrace HE project



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Executive Summary

This document is part of the outputs of the EMBRACE HE project, which was funded by the ERASMUS+ UK Agency and is running 2019-2022, project number KA203-5B5EC153.

Project partners are: Birmingham City University, United Kingdom; Universidad Publica De Navarra Spain; Western Balkans Institute, Serbia; Panepistimo Kritis Greece; Vilniious Universitetos, Lithuania.

This report outlines the Multi-language Toolkit that focused on understanding Higher Education Students' (HES) wellbeing mental health issues and how to best support HES' needs.

Toolkit 1 title: Embracing Higher Education Students' Mental Health and Wellbeing Needs by Creating a Campus Community

The mental health and adjustment challenges facing higher education students (HES) have been referred to as "a mental health crisis" (Chen et al., 2019), "the crisis in higher education" (Hubble & Bolton, 2020), and "a crisis in paradise" (Blum, 2016). In turn, higher education institutions (HEIs) are facing an unprecedented demand for counselling services and a push for change in the teaching-learning realm of academic life. These crises have engendered debates within HEIs and society at large.

HE students are facing mental health, learning, and financial challenges that negatively affect their wellbeing. Students report difficulties with anxiety, depression, and academic functioning to such an extent that this has been dubbed "a crisis in mental health" on university campuses. Exacerbating these difficulties are the many barriers students face in accessing the care they need. Counselling services are overburdened with referrals due to understaffing. Other barriers to care include stigma and a lack of knowledge about mental health and available services. In this toolkit, we have identified innovative interventions that can be implemented by HE administrators, counselling centres, and staff. It seems that the holistic 'campus community' approaches fit students' needs because they are comprehensive, flexible, and effective (Barr & McNamara, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted universities worldwide, forcing a shift to remote learning and raising questions about the future of higher education and campus life as we have known it. Providing mental health services on campuses that are upended is more challenging than ever. HEIs are delving into the digital mental health landscape. The EMBRACE project and this toolkit provides online tools (videos, podcasts, narrated PowerPoints) that higher education staff, instructors, and students may find useful as they navigate the changing landscape.

The goals and objectives of the EMBRACE toolkit 1 are as follows:

- To provide a summary of the challenges in mental health and wellbeing faced by higher education students, faculty, administrators, and policymakers around the world
- Interrogate the issues of mental health and wellbeing
- Provide an overview of the existing knowledge and debates regarding student mental health and wellbeing
- Identify and promote a shared understanding of the best practices for enhancing mental health and wellbeing on campuses across Europe
- Promote a holistic approach to healthcare and wellbeing that is flexible, adaptable, and responsive to student needs
- Identify innovative intervention practices that can function as resources for policymakers, student affairs professionals, university administrators, counselling centres, and other stakeholders

- Enhance universities' and colleges' capacity throughout Europe to support student mental health and wellbeing on campuses.

The toolkit focuses on the following issues: Mental health and wellbeing in HE; Embracing mental health care needs in HE; Holistic approaches for mental health care on HE campuses; Strengthening community relationships and connectedness; Wellbeing prevention and intervention practices. The advancement of the campus community is prioritized. Towards these ends the following online tools were produced by the EMBRACE Project partners and made available on the EMBRACE project's webpage.

1. The podcast challenges and debates summarises the challenges and debates in meeting higher education students' mental health and wellbeing needs. The summary was developed from a review of the empirical literature focusing on HES' needs and how they can be addressed. (University of Crete, Greece)
2. The narrated PowerPoint presentation: "Practices and Programming Applied in Meeting HE Students' Mental Health Needs" provides an answer to the question: How do we go about managing the "mental health crisis" on university campuses in such demanding circumstances? (University of Crete, Greece)
3. The PowerPoint presentation: "Sensitizing staff and faculty regarding mental health awareness" provides guidelines to HE staffs and faculty as to how to offer support to students who need it. A holistic campus community approach is described and the presentation responds to the question: How can collaboration and cooperation be better achieved across the different sectors and services that HE institutions provide so that policies and programming can better meet students' wellbeing needs? (University of Crete, Greece)
4. The video "Gatekeeper training in higher education" offers guidelines as to how to advance the campus community perspective by fostering mental health literacy across the campus community. responds to the question: "How can collaboration and cooperation be better achieved across the different sectors and services that HE institutions provide so that policies and programming can better meet students' wellbeing needs?" (Vilnius Universitetas, Lithuania)
5. The video "Programa Buddy" describes a peer support program and how such programs reverberate across HE campuses helping students to connect, relate, and support each other. (Universidad Publica De Navarra Spain)
6. The "Strengthening Community Relationships and Connectedness" section of the toolkit focuses on promoting students' connectedness: their sense of belonging, integration and satisfaction with their life in HE. Advancing and deepening student engagement and involvement is also discussed in the Webinar presentation where

service learning, civic engagement and the “Higher Education Learning Framework” are presented, discussed, and promoted. The video “EMBRACE HE staff about the Wellbeing of Students” responds to the following queries: What are the benefits of reflecting on teaching practice? And, how can students and staff be supported in achieving a work-life balance? (Video by BCU Team) (University of Crete, Greece)

7. The “Wellbeing: Prevention and Intervention Practices” section of the Toolkit provides students with self-help resources. They include videos focusing on: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy; Prevention and Intervention Practices and Wellbeing; Coping with loss; Overcoming Procrastination; A mindfulness toolkit and a Mindfulness video in the Greek Language and lastly “Preventing Dating Violence.” These skills focused presentations and exercises can to empower students, enhance their life skills and enhance their academic, social and emotional skills. (University of Crete, Greece)

In conclusion

As the world changes, educational institutions must lead courageously. All parties with an investment in higher education should have a voice in these conversations: students who are demanding a more relevant education; parents who are making emotional and material investments in their children; faculty members who are protecting academic freedom, encouraging and enhancing learning, and contributing to the wellbeing of students and the broader community. We all must learn from and relate to each other, processes upon which education and flourishing depend (Gill & Gergen, 2020).

In a world that has to come together in the face of multiple health, social, environmental, and economic crises, HEIs must continue to reach out to a challenged society and world, acting as a voice of empowerment, support, safeguarding, and relevant educational experience.

References

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