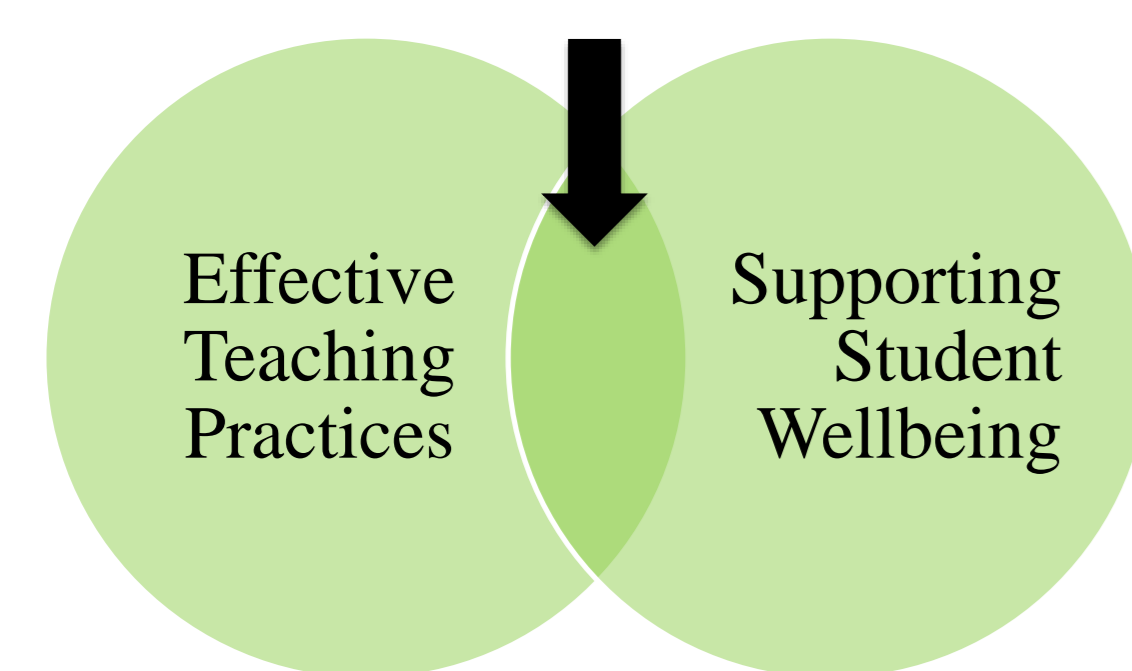


Identifying the influence of teaching practices on undergraduate students' mental health and wellbeing in the Faculties of Arts and Science

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Introduction

Studies have indicated that good mental health and wellbeing enhances a student's ability to learn (Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer, 2013; Keyes et al., 2012; Martin, 2010). Evidence also shows that different teaching practices affect student learning outcomes (Dennison, Gruber, & Vrbsky, 2010; Moulding, 2010; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014). However, to date, it remains unknown whether teaching practices influence postsecondary students' mental health and wellbeing and if so, how. This TLEF-funded project seeks to identify teaching practices that are effective at both promoting effective learning and supporting student wellbeing.



Year 1 of the project (2015-16) focused on data collection and analysis; year 2 of the project (2016-2017) will focus on creating and sharing professional development resources for instructors. Various types of knowledge translation have already been integrated throughout the project.

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Further Information

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Methods

This project used mixed methods to identify teaching practices that promote student mental health and wellbeing in the Faculties of Arts and Science.

- Qualitative and quantitative questions included on 2015 Undergraduate Experiences Survey (UES)
- Data analysis to inform interview and focus group questions and identify instructors to interview
- Fall-term student focus groups and instructor interviews
- Preliminary data analysis to inform 2016 UES and winter-term focus groups and interviews
- Winter-term student focus groups and instructor interviews
- Data analysis of focus groups, interviews and 2016 UES data
- Creation and sharing of professional development resources

Participants

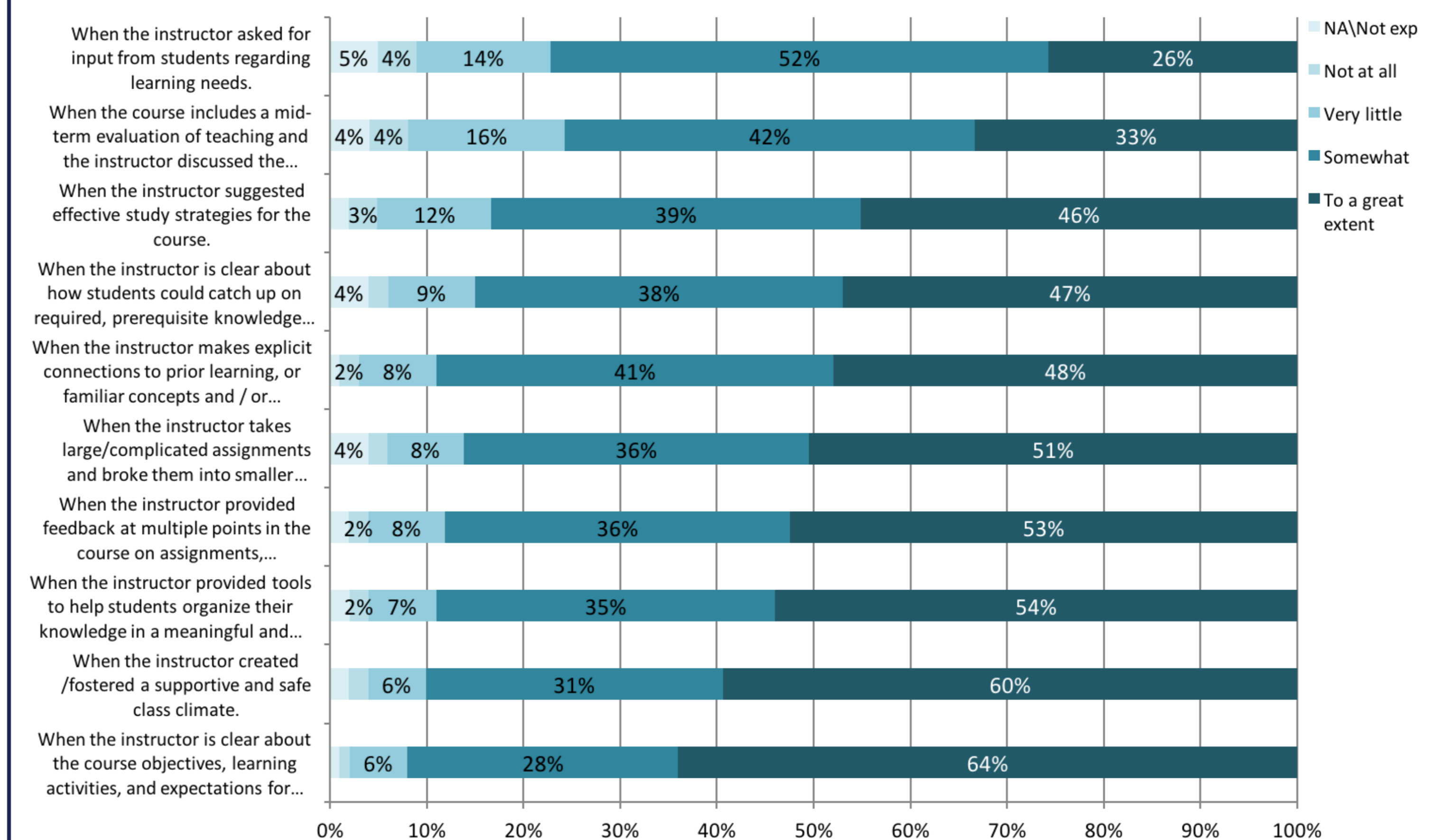
2015 UES:
 5591 undergraduate students from across campus answered the 2015 UES quantitative questions; ~2000 students answered the qualitative questions.

Instructor Interviews:
 16 instructors from Arts (n=8) and Sciences (n=8) whom students identified as promoting their mental health and wellbeing (via the 2015 UES) were interviewed. Instructors included 9 female and 7 male; Instructors interviewed included both pre-tenure and tenured professors from the teaching (n=11) and research (n=5) streams.

Student Focus Groups:
 29 full-time undergraduate students from Arts (n=20; 17 female, 3 male) and Sciences (n=9; 5 female, 4 male) participated in 7 focus groups. Participants represented all year levels.

Preliminary Findings

Findings from the 2015 UES: *To what extent to the following teaching practices promote your mental health and wellbeing?*



In addition to being the most important teaching practice for promoting student mental health and wellbeing identified on the 2015 UES, the need for clear expectations emerged in all aspects of the study.

Preliminary findings indicate that student mental health and wellbeing is enhanced when:

- Students feel connected to their peers, the instructor and the subject matter
- Students feel supported in their ability to succeed, through an engaging classroom experience and having clear expectations for success

An analysis using the principles of *How Learning Works* (Ambrose, 2010) indicates that two principles of effective teaching have the greatest impact on student wellbeing:

- Students' motivation determines, directs, and sustains what they do to learn
- Students' current level of development interacts with the social, emotional, and intellectual climate of the course to impact learning

Clear expectations of what is desired from the students is the single greatest factor that influences my wellbeing in the classroom ~Student on UES

I think it's difficult when there are always surprises in a class and just not knowing what to study for a midterm is just really stressful because you feel like you have to study everything. But you can't study everything in detail so you kind of have to pick and choose ~Student 23

I also feel that giving the students a well, very detailed syllabus is very useful because then I know exactly what is expected of me. ~Student 27

The most important things that we're trying to teach are things that are extremely difficult if not impossible to codify as explicit learning outcomes or course expectations ... the more detailed it [course syllabus] becomes the less it is compatible with the kind of critical thinking that is [the] real goal. ~Instructor 10

I can ... set it up so they [students] know what to expect for the exams so that they're not a big scary thing and I hope that by promoting wellness in that way ... [it] will free them up to be able to learn more, to be able to enjoy it because they're not so under pressure ~Instructor 7

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