

'Conversations in Wellbeing': Reflections on 3 Vehicles for Campus Engagement

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Introduction

During the Summer/Fall period of 2015, I undertook work as a Sustainability Scholar to support Wellbeing at UBC through continuation of the 'Conversations in Wellbeing' Engagement Strategy. My role was to apply academic learning from my graduate program to the facilitation and coordination of conversations across campus between and among staff, faculty, and students, explicitly building on past work completed by previous scholars.

This report evaluates the work during this time period, specifically reflecting on challenges and opportunities related to campus engagement work more broadly. This document includes an explanation of Wellbeing at UBC, the 'Conversations in Engagement' project, the major literature which informed my work, and the lessons learned from three vehicles for engagement including Staff Tune-ins, the Graduate Student Wellbeing Network, and the Faculty Wellbeing Cohort.

The Context of Wellbeing at UBC

Wellbeing at UBC is working with campus and external partners to build happier and healthier campus communities by embedding wellbeing into the very fabric of campus life and stimulating a university-wide cultural shift. In order to advance wellbeing on campus in a socially and environmentally responsible manner, this initiative recognizes the importance of pairing grassroots efforts with higher level policy support. As such, helping to frame and provide guidance for this process are the *Okanagan Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges* and *Wellbeing at UBC's Roadmap* document.

A pledge to bring back the Okanagan Charter for review and adoption was signed by the University of British Columbia's President and Student Association President at the International Conference on Health Promoting Universities and Colleges in June 2015. The Charter is an internationally developed commitment to the integration of health into all university policies and practices. The Charter asks universities to utilize a settings-based and whole system approach to health promotion, while emphasizing participatory approaches to collaboration. For Wellbeing at UBC, the signing of the Charter pledge was evidence of UBC's commitment to real cultural change in terms of wellbeing.

Building on the principles and calls to action in the Okanagan Charter, Wellbeing at UBC is guided by a Roadmap produced in mid-2015. The Roadmap outlines five major areas of interest including: built & natural environments; food & nutrition; inclusion & connectivity; mental health & resilience; and physical activity & sedentary behaviour reduction. The guiding principles of Wellbeing at UBC are also presented in the Roadmap and they include:

Wellbeing at UBC Guiding Principles

Be a catalyst

Enabling, connecting, facilitating

Create an inclusive community development process

Everyone has something to offer

Use scholarly methods

In teaching, learning, research and development

Advance “Campus as a Living Lab”

To include health, wellbeing and sustainability of people and environments

Forge partnerships

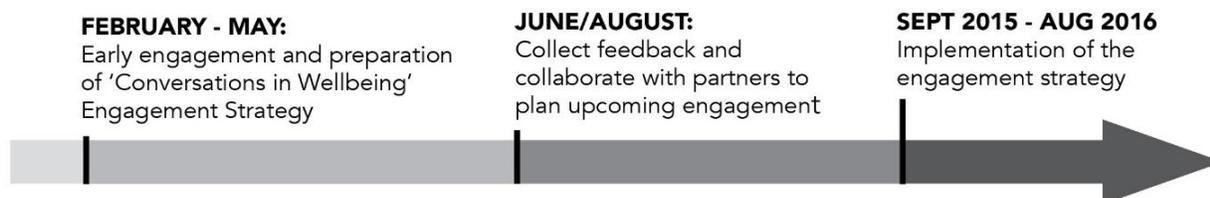
Among individuals, units, organizations and across students, staff, faculty, community.

Foster collaboration and comparison within and between Vancouver and Okanagan campuses to enrich learning and enable multi-site research and development.

In order to identify priorities and create community led change, Wellbeing at UBC has instigated a university-wide engagement effort entitled ‘Conversations in Wellbeing’.

Engagement Strategy

The ‘Conversations in Wellbeing’ Engagement Strategy is a grad student-created effort intended to facilitate community engagement through a coordinated and collaborative approach, engaging with those already working to promote wellbeing on UBC campuses. This paper evaluates selected components of the engagement work which was carried out under this strategy during the 2015 May to October period of the following timeline:



Two previous Sustainability Scholars (Stephanie Aitken and Jenna Dunsby), crafted goals and objectives for the ‘Conversations in Wellbeing’ project, seen below:

Engagement Strategy Goals & Objectives

GOALS	OBJECTIVES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inspire a ‘Wellbeing’ Movement from the Beginning/Inside-Out 2. Engage People in Surprising ways 3. Facilitate Innovation Through Collaboration 4. Towards a ‘Living Strategy’: Enable a Learning Orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase awareness • Celebrate success • Inspire interest • Share information • Build networks • Build capacity • Align communications • Encourage 2-way dialogue • Data collection • Collaboration

Taking place on both the Vancouver and Okanagan campuses, this strategy involves taking a university wide approach to engage students, staff, faculty, campus residents, alumni, First Nations, and external community partners.

By working with partners across campus to link into existing events and programs, the strategy proposes to better understand community perceptions and priorities around wellbeing, by broadly asking the four following questions:

1. What does wellbeing mean to you?
2. How can we build healthier and happier campus communities?
3. What should our wellbeing priorities be at UBC?
4. How would you like to be involved?

Further Engagement Influences

Each scholar is asked to bring their own learning to the project and, as such, urban planning principles for effective community engagement were utilized to foster meaningful connections across campus throughout this phase of 'Conversations in Wellbeing'.

Some of the major influences include:

LADDER OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Created by Sherry Arnstein (1969), the Ladder of Citizen Participation presents one understanding of engagement whereby the manner in which engagement is conducted is evaluated based on its ability to empower citizens. Divided into 8 rungs, the Ladder expresses the importance of entrusting power to citizens through the utilization of partnership, delegation, and citizen control. This model can be integrated into campus engagement by recognizing how the format through which one engages can influence the ability of campus community members to effect development and internalize changes.

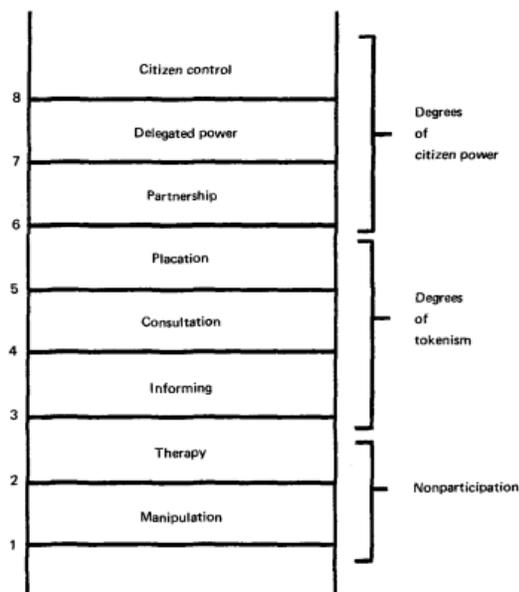


Figure 1: The Ladder of Citizen Participation by Arnstein¹

¹ From the AIP Journal 1969 <https://www.planning.org/pas/memo/2007/mar/pdf/JAPA35No4.pdf>

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Appreciative Inquiry is a method and manner of communicating within an organization which shifts away from negative patterns and transitions them to something entirely positive. It is based on the understanding that all organizations have untapped positive cores which can be drawn out through successful inquiry. The approach seeks to tap into the potential of communities and unleash creativity, knowledge, and spirit towards a common purpose.

The process follows these four steps:

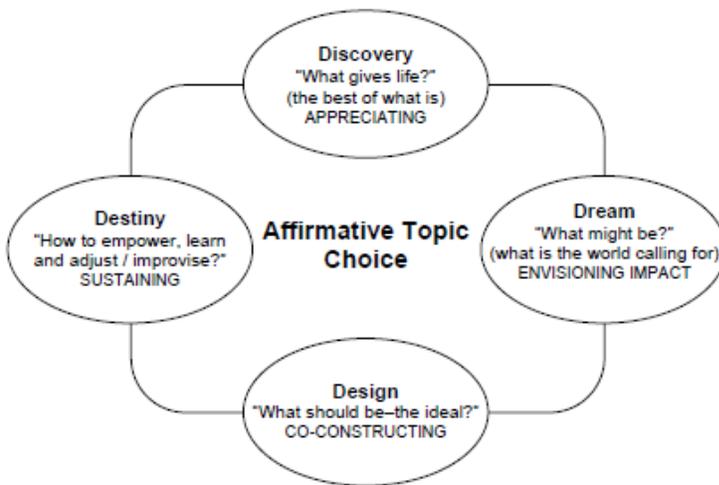


Figure 2: Appreciative Inquiry 4D Cycle²

Appreciative Inquiry can be utilized in a campus engagement context by focusing on positive initiatives already underway and helping empowered community members expand on their success and talents.

COMMUNITY: THE STRUCTURE OF BELONGING

In Peter Block's book *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (2008), the author explores community development and the creation of connectedness. Block explains that when individuals attempt to develop social fabric, they are always tasked with asking the questions: "Who do we want in the room?" and "What is the new conversation that we want to occur?" As such, there is an obligation of those bringing community members together to consider carefully how to answer those questions responsibly and equitably.

Referencing John McKnight, Block recommends three things which he believes are crucial for truly building community. Firstly, Block suggests "focusing on gifts," meaning that in a group of individuals excited about change-making, building on existing positive actions goes further than dwelling on deficiencies, not unlike the Appreciative Inquiry model. Secondly, by referencing the inevitable limitations of any system, Block suggests bringing care back to the community and preventing care from being delivered solely by providers. In a broader sense, he suggests focusing internally rather than drawing from the external. Lastly, Block explains that those best capable of identifying and solving problems are those affected by

² From Appreciative Inquiry Australia <http://appreciativeinquiry.com.au/forum-2010/background/invitation/4d-cycle/>

them, therefore providing individuals within a community with power is most effective in stimulating change.

These insights are applicable to campus engagement in a multitude of ways. They explain that the most powerful method for creating action-driven communities is to let community members utilize the gifts they have, share the load, and solve their own problems through simply providing support.

Three Vehicles for Engagement

One of the main goals of the 'Conversations in Wellbeing' Engagement Strategy was to coordinate efforts across units and community members. I examine three of these collaborative working groups, each with a unique structure and purpose for faculty, students, and staff. The remainder of this document seeks to inform the future of these three groups, and campus engagement more broadly, by evaluating the challenges and opportunities associated with each effort. Faculty, students, and staff were consulted during this evaluation and their insights have been anonymously included and expanded upon in each section.

Taking into consideration the models for community engagement, facilitation efforts were conducted with faculty, students, and staff both collectively and separately. Groups organized around themes were empowered to address wellbeing priorities at UBC. The role of the Sustainability Scholars was to facilitate and capture discussion. While staff were ultimately involved in all engagement groups, groups were tailored for students and faculty independently to cater to their diverse and distinct needs.

FACULTY

Through a collaboration between sustainability scholars, faculty, and staff, the Faculty Wellbeing Cohort was created and is currently being developed by a group of faculty and staff. Guided by 5 overarching priorities and a scope of practice which was crafted collectively, the Faculty Wellbeing Cohort is working to bring together faculty from all disciplines to discuss how to incorporate wellbeing into their teaching practices and curriculum. This initial phase of the Cohort has been working to cultivate direction and purpose for faculty, while being mindful of opportunities to expand their reach beyond the inaugural members of the group.

Challenges & Opportunities

1) Getting Buy In

The process of developing a strategy to get buy in from faculty for the Cohort led to many discussions of who should be involved and how the group might stimulate interest. A major issue regarding getting buy in from faculty was related to diversity. As the group developed a strategy for engaging their colleagues, it became clear that certain techniques for sparking interest in wellbeing in one discipline may not work in another. While it was accepted that appealing to the research networking side of faculty (who in some form or another may be involved in wellbeing on campus and looking for projects), would be a powerful tool for recruiting many, utilizing that technique alone would not spark the interest of those who exist in other disciplines. For example, researchers in the hard sciences may not be looking for the same type of collaborative projects as colleagues in other fields. The faculty group decided that advertising and meetings of the Cohort should take many forms and work to cater to a multitude of disciplines.

2) Maintaining Momentum

The group noted early in the developmental phase of the Cohort that faculty are overcommitted and overscheduled, so maintaining momentum through the semester would be a challenge. Faculty members therefore suggested crafting a diversity of engagement levels for faculty members so they could select a level of involvement that would fit into their schedule. An in-or-out membership format would not be appealing to a busy faculty member. The group also determined that hosting events related to wellbeing research during awareness weeks (such as Thrive, which focuses on mental health on campus) would be a draw for faculty. So long as engagement was presented as an opportunity to network for research related items, it would be easier to draw faculty into the group. However, the format of the events would need to vary as some groups may be more open to dialogue and others to presentations.

3) Defining Involvement

There is a need to find a balance between providing faculty with a clear idea of when/how they could be involved with the group and still maintain a mandate open to suggestion and development as more faculty are invited to be involved. Ultimately, the group felt that for faculty to view the Cohort as something they could feasibly incorporate into their schedules, it is important to be able to tell them exactly what level of participation is expected so they can successfully budget their time. As the group develops, it needs to be flexible as participants raise additional opinions regarding its structure and function.

Reflections

In my opinion, the most important insight from this working group was the power of knowing your audience. To entice faculty through an engagement process it is important to determine how best to appeal to their aspirations and provide them with the flexibility required for their involvement.

STUDENTS

Graduate students are a challenging group to engage with because a significant number are disconnected and uninterested when it comes to campus networks and programs. One reason may be that they perceive initiatives and opportunities to be undergraduate specific and unrelated to their grad experience on campus. My focus for student engagement was the Graduate Student Wellbeing Network (GSWN), which came about in the same timeframe as the Faculty Wellbeing Cohort. The GSWN is a collaboration between staff and students who are committed to the creation of a campus-wide wellbeing support system specific to graduate students. The GSWN began as a series of conversations with graduate students about their unique needs, and developed into a suggestion to get wellbeing representatives on student councils in each academic faculty/program. The goal is to bring graduate students together during GSWN meetings to address needs.

Challenges & Opportunities

1) Champions

Graduate students tend to spend a limited number of years on campus when completing their degree. Accordingly, the GSWN has the challenge of coming about through a small number of student champions in a short space of time. The challenge with a reliance on a small number of champions is the instability of the group. Students are busy with other priorities, and ensuring that the group is strong enough to

persist is crucial in allowing individuals to step up when they have time and a step back when they have other work.

2) Staff Support

Staff have been involved in most GSWN discussions to date, but the group has always worked to balance institutional support with grassroots independence. An entirely student led group would have the advantages of increased ownership of purpose and therefore create more buy in from other graduate students (as suggested by Arnstein's ladder). On the other hand, the group has recognized the value of incorporating staff knowledge into the engagement process, especially as the GSWN is new and under development. Staff (those involved in the group and more broadly speaking) have institutional memory and the ability to disseminate knowledge about campus resources. By allowing staff to help students find the best methods to tackle challenges, the process was made more efficient on many occasions. However, students need to be the ones to make decisions and represent the interests of other grad students. The balance between institutional support and grassroots student representation is an important piece moving forward.

3) Utilizing Campus Opportunities in a Strategic Manner

As the group developed, there were initiatives taking place on campus with potential for securing support for the GSWN and aiding in its longevity. The most important example of this is UBC's Student Mental Health audit which is looking at how it can further support projects and initiatives across campus. However, focusing on this specific campus movement only deals with one issue, mental health, and may narrow the scope of the GSWN if made too central in the group. The GSWN was envisioned as being most impactful through a diversity of actions, guided a number of concerns considered to be a part of "wellbeing" as a concept (e.g. physical activity, connectedness, nutrition, etc.). To ensure the GSWN fully represents its purpose, it should pursue a holistic understanding of wellbeing, and not just narrow the focus to individual support opportunities, funding or otherwise.

Reflections

The Graduate Student Wellbeing Network exists as a balancing act. With graduate students often spending a limited time at UBC, in order for the group to persist through cohorts of students, the GSWN will need to work effectively with staff, and as a group, entrench itself in the fabric of UBC's community. If successful, the group could reflect the empowerment found in the top tiers of Arnstein's ladder of participation.

STAFF

Whether they have a mandate to serve faculty, staff, students, or a combination of groups, staff have been a central part of engagement efforts related to Wellbeing at UBC. One major engagement effort for staff is a series of Staff Tune-Ins, where staff from units across campus were brought together to share their work. The Tune-Ins are meant to support those conducting work related to campus wellbeing becoming aware of their colleagues' efforts and to provide them with an opportunity to share creative forms of engagement. Staff were invited to thematically-oriented discussions, such as 'the link between sustainability and wellbeing', 'physical activity and sedentary behaviour', and 'the role of the Okanagan Charter for Health Promoting Universities'.

Challenges & Opportunities

1) Defining Roles

One identified challenge associated with engagement of staff was defining the role of a coordinating initiative and providing the impetus for staff to claim ownership of Wellbeing at UBC. There was confusion initially on the part of staff as to whether Wellbeing at UBC played a directive versus facilitating role. It became clearer to participants over time that the purpose of the initiative was to bring people together and foster an inclusive community development process. One proposal made along the way to have staff feel ownership over the Tune-In's was to share the role of 'host' across units and move meetings around on campus.

2) Themes

Utilizing a themes approach to working with staff on campus was beneficial. It gave staff the opportunity to call out to colleagues for advice on particular areas of interest, where some groups may be further along in tackling one issue than others. Staff engaged with wellbeing on campus deal with diverse topics and some groups are more comfortable with one than another. Meeting under a theme allowed staff to ask specific questions of their colleagues and build on other's successes across campus. It was not uncommon to hear staff praise each other's work and ask how their talents may be used in another units work. It also gave staff the ability to collaborate and tackle more daunting pieces of wellbeing together, by sharing knowledge, resources, and efforts.

Reflections

Due to their commitment to advancing wellbeing on campus, staff have proven to be an important group to support and incorporate into all engagement efforts. Allowing staff the space and opportunity to utilize their own knowledge of the needs of campus communities has allowed them to flourish and been a critical driver behind the success of the 'Conversations in Wellbeing' engagement strategy.

Recommendations

Based on an overall reflection of the three student, staff, and faculty engagement vehicles included in this project, I propose the following recommendations for future campus engagement efforts:

- **Cater to the group of interest** – not all groups respond to the same prompts or formats and as appreciative inquiry tells us, the more diversity included in a process, the more likely all strengths can be drawn out of an organization
- **Back grassroots initiatives with higher level policy** – and involve a diverse set of community members at all levels of seniority – this allows for meaningful participation, such as the forms found on the top rungs of Arnstein's ladder
- **Provide opportunities for community members to disseminate their knowledge** – do not reinvent the wheel, seek out the positives that already exist within the organization
- **Allow champions to take initiative but remember that groups provide longevity** – finding support in administrative channels is one method of ensuring lasting change
- **Provide real provision for change** – so community members are shown their input and efforts are impactful and worthwhile (this avoids the trap of tokenism which can be disengaging if consistent over time)

- **Just getting people in the same room can be powerful in itself** - opening up channels of communication (especially through the appreciative inquiry model of seeking out the positive) helps solidify what already exists and build new opportunities for progress