

Developing a UBC Action Framework for Mental Health & Resilience

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Executive Summary

UBC Wellbeing is a collaborative effort across the Vancouver and Okanagan campuses to enhance wellbeing for all students, faculty, staff and university neighbours. Mental health and resilience have been identified as a priority area for UBC to address in order to become a health and wellbeing promoting university. The purpose of my project was to develop a draft of the action framework for the mental health and resilience priority. The action framework intends to establish a shared vision, working definitions of mental health and resilience, and to synthesize existing strategies, practices, and actions across both UBC campuses for the purpose of improving the mental health and resilience of students, staff, and faculty. Therefore, the emphasis was placed not only on writing the framework, but also on engaging stakeholders to guide the establishment of a shared vision of a thriving campus for all.

The process of developing the action framework consisted of a literature search, staff interviews, and hosting a faculty roundtable. The literature search was non-systematic. It explored published articles and reports related to mental health and resilience in universities. The interviews were conducted with staff members who are part of the UBC mental health and resilience working group. These staff members come from various departments including Human Resources, Counseling Services, and student wellbeing units on both the Okanagan and Vancouver campuses. Staff members were asked formulated questions, and their answers were summarized to guide the development of the action framework. The purpose of the roundtable was to broadly explore mental health and resilience research at UBC. The faculty roundtable was a two-hour event where nine different faculty members from UBC Okanagan and UBC Vancouver made short four-minute presentations. My role was to plan the logistics of the event including inviting faculty and staff, developing a session activity and the discussion questions, and scheduling the event. The discussions and presentations held at the roundtable were to inform a body of research to be reflected in the action framework and beyond.

Throughout my work, I supported the coordination of the monthly meeting attended by the mental health and resilience working group. We discussed the implementation of the staff interviews, the faculty roundtable, and more importantly, the development of the action framework. Our discussions started with

asking, “What is mental health and resilience?” after which we debated various components of the definitions I had developed as a result of the literature review. Then, based on a synthesis of the feedback from the working group, we discussed the vision for the two campuses for improving mental health and resilience, and followed this with a discussion of how we could structure the action framework.

Based on our discussions, we decided to structure the action framework to align with the eight principles of action outlined in the Okanagan Charter¹. The Okanagan Charter is an International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges that calls upon post-secondary schools to embed health into all aspects of campus culture and to lead health promotion action and collaboration locally and globally. The Charter’s eight principles of action include:

1. Use settings and whole system approaches
2. Ensure comprehensive and campus-wide approaches
3. Use participatory approaches and engage the voice of students and others
4. Develop trans-disciplinary collaborations and cross-sector partnerships
5. Promote research, innovation and evidence-informed action
6. Build on strengths
7. Value local and indigenous communities’ contexts and priorities
8. Act on an existing universal responsibility

The decision to focus on the principles in the Charter is due to the fact that existing frameworks and strategies inform the University’s priorities and plans for enhancing mental health and resiliency. Based on the discussions from interviews and the faculty roundtable, as well as published documents such as the Okanagan Charter, the working group has agreed that these eight principles of action align with our current and future actions on improving mental health and resilience. Currently, the action framework draft is being reviewed by a smaller sub-group. Upon completion, the action framework will contain examples of how to promote mental health and resilience for each of the principles of action to encourage leadership and action from all corners of the University. Ultimately, the action framework aims to foster collective action from all members of the community to promote mental health and resilience of self, colleagues, and the organization.

In order to foster coordinated action, next steps will involve extensive communication and engagement strategies. When the action framework is published, there will be many accompanying workshops and events that will encourage leadership from community members. Through consultation sessions in the fall, including Thrive 2017, campus stakeholders will be consulted regarding the vision for and definitions of mental health and resilience. Through consultation and engagement, the working group will seek to mobilize the campus communities toward a common understanding of and collective action toward enhanced mental health and resilience of all members of the University.

¹ Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges (2015).