



Inside
Higher
Ed

January 30, 2024

Academic Courses Promote Student Flourishing

Four types of for-credit courses at colleges and universities are teaching learners how to adapt, thrive and dream big as they look toward the future.

By Ashley Mowreader



2023 survey from Harvard's Graduate School of Education found 36 percent of young adults (18- to 25-year-olds) experience anxiety and 29 percent report depression. A third of students (34 percent) shared they feel lonely, 44 percent feel unimportant and 45 percent have a general sense that "things are falling apart."

MEDIA Coverage



In response to higher levels of mental health concerns among students, institutions have implemented programming and co-curricular activities to encourage wellness, resilience and belonging. More are creating curricular opportunities for students to earn credit or credentials in studying their own mental health and wellness.

Here are four versions of credit-bearing courses for undergraduate and graduate students that encourage supervised practice of happiness, reflection and gratitude to impact their own lives and others.

Short-form classes

During the January 2023 term, students at Hollins University could take a three-week course on resiliency and healing from trauma. The course met three days per week for three hours each day, learning how to cope with struggles and heal from past experiences.

Students learned real-life skills and strategies, including Qoya yoga, trauma body reintegration, how to partake in forest bathing and nature walks, and meditation strategies. The class was pass-fail but required students to participate actively. Course instructor Abrina Schnurman, assistant professor and executive director of the Batten Leadership Institute at Hollins, found students were more able to self-soothe and connect with one another following the experience.

The University of Maryland, College Park, launched a seven-week course on emotional regulation skills in January 2023. The course, U SAD? Coping With Stress, Anxiety and Depression, requires students to watch videos and read articles about anxiety, interpersonal communication and suicide prevention, among other topic areas, and practice coping skills. Students also complete regular reflections on their learning.

Certificates

Madison Area Technical College in Wisconsin created a certificate program focused on the “building blocks of well-being” to help learners address self-care and develop personal growth strategies.

The certificate, housed in the business division, can be completed completely online or in a hybrid format over the course of one semester, earning a student nine credit hours. Course subject matter includes developing a growth mindset, gratitude, persistence, critical thinking, problem-solving, conflict resolution and empathy, among other topics. Upon completion, students can display a digital badge to share on social media platforms such as LinkedIn.

Other institutions certify students in caring for their community through mental health first-aid programs. Western New England University trained 16 faculty members, staff and administrators to serve as mental health first aid instructors, with the goal of training one-third of the campus community.

Through the certification, people learn to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorder. Stakeholders can get certified in one day.

Undergraduate credit

Yale University has one of the most recognized courses on happiness, called Psychology and the Good Life, an undergraduate lecture course that focuses on positive psychology and behavioral change.

The University of Pittsburgh offered a three-credit interdisciplinary course on happiness and human flourishing in spring 2023. The course highlighted the conceptions of happiness and how students can apply topics to their lives. The three faculty members were affiliated with the school of nursing and the departments of English and engineering, bringing together the experts' views on creating an improved and happier world.

MEDIA Coverage



New for spring 2024, the University of Miami offers a course called The Art and Science of Flourishing in the School of Education and Human Development. The course will draw on different schools of thought, including Aristotelian, Buddhist, Hindu and Confucian perspectives, and encourage students to connect with their peers and practice gratitude.

Graduate program

Centenary University's accredited master's program in happiness studies is taught by psychology professors at the New Jersey institution. The fully-online program, which takes two years to complete, teaches students to understand and apply the science of happiness and increase well-being and flourishing in the student's self and community.

The program is designed to appeal to leaders in the modern workforce who want to increase employee retention and productivity, according to the university. The first cohort had 90 students enrolled as of June 2023.

—*—