



ACADEMIC WELLBEING INITIATIVE

Academic Wellbeing in the Classroom

Research-Informed Practices that Strengthen Learning, Rigor, and Faculty Sustainability

Supporting students while sustaining the work of teaching



The Student Landscape Has Changed

Students arrive with increasingly varied:

- 1 Academic preparation
- 2 Executive functioning skills
- 3 Learning needs and neurodivergence
- 4 Responsibilities outside the classroom
- 5 Relationships with technology and AI

Faculty are navigating a more complex teaching environment, too.



We Listened

Academic Wellbeing Initiative

24

Faculty & admin
listening sessions

73

Faculty and
administrators

15

Student
listening sessions

106

Students

Themes that emerged

Executive functioning

Neurodivergence

Academic overload

Competing demands

Digital distraction

Mental health strain

Relationships & connection



How do we design learning environments that...

1

Support student success

2

Maintain academic rigor

3

Strengthen relationships

4

Support faculty
sustainability



Five Practices

Five lenses on work many faculty already do

1 Lead with Clarity

2 Build Flexibility into Structure

3 Design for Engagement & Access

4 Make Learning Strategies Visible

5 Foster Connection & Belonging



1 Lead with Clarity

Students benefit from knowing

- What is expected
- What matters most
- What quality looks like
- How assignments connect to learning goals

Practical approaches

- Clear calendars and expectations
- Rubrics and grading criteria
- Examples or models
- Explaining the purpose behind assignments and policies

Clarity doesn't lower the bar. It makes the expectations of the bar more visible.



2

Build Flexibility into Structure

Students' lives don't always follow the syllabus.

Students may be balancing

- Employment
- Athletics
- Family responsibilities
- Health concerns

Flexibility can coexist with structure

- Grace days
- Deadline windows
- Dropping a lowest score
- Low-stakes practice before high-stakes assessment

Predictable flexibility beats case-by-case negotiation.



3

Design for Engagement & Access

Universal Design for Learning

Possible practices

- Slides or outlines available in advance
- Verbal + written instructions
- Scaffolding complex assignments
- Appropriate choice in demonstrating learning

Also consider

- Processing time before discussion
- Regular, actionable feedback
- Accessible course materials
- Reflection and metacognition

Same learning outcomes. Fewer unnecessary barriers.



4

Make Learning Strategies Visible

Executive Functioning + Metacognition

Faculty can make learning processes visible by

- Narrating expert thinking
- Modeling how to approach complex problems
- Breaking major assignments into stages
- Using drafts and checkpoints

Also consider

- Modeling backward planning
- Asking students to reflect on strategies

And AI makes this increasingly important.

Emphasize process, reflection, application, and thinking — not simply the final product.



5

Foster Connection & Belonging

Academic wellbeing is relational.

Students engage more deeply when they feel

- Known
- Respected
- Included
- Connected
- That they belong

Small practices matter

- Learn and use student names
- Create recurring opportunities for interaction
- Normalize office hours and help-seeking
- Reach out when patterns of disengagement emerge

Small practices communicate something powerful: you belong here.



Relationship-Rich Education

Students don't just learn from faculty.

They learn through relationships with faculty.

"You belong here."

"Your ideas matter."

"I believe you can do this."

"Let's figure out how you can get there."

Relational support and academic rigor can reinforce one another.



Academic Wellbeing Is Also About Faculty

What supports students can sometimes support faculty, too.

Intentional course design can

- Reduce repetitive exception handling
- Clarify expectations
- Decrease crisis management
- Create predictable processes
- Protect faculty time and boundaries
- Make support more systematic

The goal isn't:

~~"Do more for students."~~

It is:

"Design so that fewer things require extraordinary intervention."



The opportunity is to hold both.

Rigor + Compassion

Standards + Flexibility

Accountability + Belonging

Rigor with Humanity

High expectations + clear structure • Academic challenge + meaningful support • Accountability + relationship



Academic Wellbeing Is a Partnership

THE FACULTY GUIDE ASKS

What can we do in the learning environment?

THE STUDENT GUIDE ASKS

What can students do to strengthen their own academic wellbeing?

Students are encouraged to:

Take ownership of learning

Build structure into their time

Use resources early

Manage digital distraction

Build connection and belonging

Academic wellbeing lives in the space between them.



Academic Wellbeing at Loyola

A Jesuit approach to education asks us to attend to the whole person.

Students are developing

Knowledge

Habits of Learning

Reflection

Resilience

Relationships

Responsibility

Purpose

Academic wellbeing is an upstream expression of *cura personalis*.



The Takeaway

*Academic wellbeing and academic excellence are not competing goals.
They can be mutually reinforcing.*

- Clear expectations
- Accessible learning
- Meaningful relationships
- Intentional structure
- Explicit skill development
- Reasonable flexibility

These practices help students learn — and they can help faculty sustain the work of teaching.



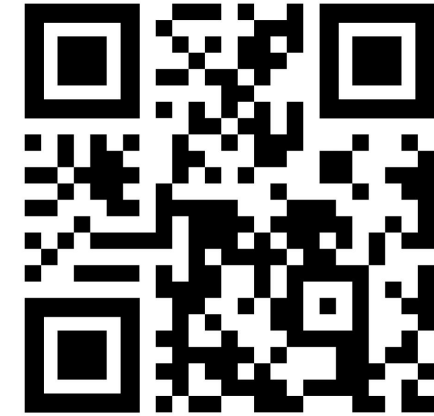
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Syllabus Activity



Notice language that:

- Builds trust versus creates anxiety.
- Clearly communicates expectations while preserving instructor flexibility.
- Encourages students to seek help early.
- Reflects an understanding that attendance and participation are related but distinct.
- Normalizes the use of campus support resources rather than treating them as a last resort.
- Recognizes that well-being and accountability can coexist.
- Reinforces a growth mindset instead of a punitive one.
- Makes expectations transparent without relying primarily on penalties.
- Uses language that is equitable for students managing illness, disability, caregiving responsibilities, or other legitimate life circumstances.

Potential Areas for Improvement



- Automatic grade penalties based solely on absences.
- Requiring documentation for every circumstance.
- Policies that unintentionally discourage students from staying home when ill.
- Vague language such as "the instructor will determine" without explaining guiding principles.
- Framing support offices as solely the student's responsibility rather than part of a shared partnership.
- Participation defined only by speaking in class, which may disadvantage some students.
- A late work policy that provides no pathway for communication or recovery.
- A concluding message that emphasizes compliance more than learning or belonging.

Let's try this again...



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Questions to Guide Your Syllabus Review...

1

Is the Expectation Clear?

Students understand what success looks like.

2

Does the policy support learning?

The policy advances the learning outcomes rather than simply enforcing compliance.

3

Does it preserve faculty discretion?

The instructor retains professional judgment instead of relying on rigid rules.

4

Does it communicate belonging and support?

Students understand that they are expected to succeed and that help is available when they encounter obstacles.

Resources & Closing

FOR FACULTY

Academic Wellbeing in the Classroom

Research-informed practices that strengthen learning, rigor, and faculty sustainability



FOR STUDENTS

Academic Wellbeing as a Student

Practices that strengthen learning, balance, and success



Rigor with Humanity

Challenged intellectually. Supported relationally. Held accountable. Given room to grow.

Thank you for the work you do to support student learning and development.