



**Inspiration from  
the United States to  
Higher Education in  
Denmark**

# **DESIGNING A HAPPIER STUDENT LIFE FOR BETTER LEARNING**

Insights on how to enhance student well-being to  
create optimal conditions for successful academic  
learning and growth

**INNOVATION  
CENTRE  
DENMARK**

## **Outlook Report September 2023**

Innovation Centre Denmark Silicon Valley  
Innovation Centre Denmark Boston

### **Editorial team:**

Telli Betül Karacan  
Martin Etchells Vigild, PhD  
Benedikta Harris  
Allan Skårup Kristensen  
Torben Orla Nielsen

### **Contributors:**

Maiken Gelardi, PhD  
Greg Walton, PhD  
Richard Webber, PhD  
Helen Chu, PhD  
Anne-Sofie Saabye Møller

### **Layout and design:**

Jakob Lindmark Frier  
Vratislav Pecka

All rights reserved. No part of this project may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher.

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>Preface</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: Happiness and positive psychology</b>	<b>6</b>
Offering a course on happiness	6
<i>Popularity and impact</i>	7
<i>What do you learn in a happiness course?</i>	8
<i>Time</i>	9
Positive Psychology in the Classroom	10
<i>The importance of teamwork in happiness</i>	11
The Danish context	14
<b>CHAPTER 2: Reimagining the Classroom</b>	<b>15</b>
The Impact of Physical Space	16
<i>Design strategies for active learning</i>	18
<i>New supporting technologies</i>	19
Educational spaces on the agenda in the United States	20
The Danish context	21
<b>CHAPTER 3: Successful transitioning for students</b>	<b>22</b>
Student counselling and career services	23
From student to young professional	24
University-Industry collaborations	26
American 'mindset interventions'	27
The Danish context	29
<b>CHAPTER 4: Gender and Diversity: Improving Educational Equity</b>	<b>30</b>
<i>Self-regulation, a key to well-being</i>	30
The role of institutional mindsets on educational equity	33
<i>The power of interventions</i>	34
<i>Institutional obligations going forward</i>	35
The Danish context	36
<b>CHAPTER 5: Future Well-being</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Sources</b>	<b>39</b>

# PREFACE

This Outlook report is a part of the project 'Designing a happier student life for better learning,' managed by Innovation Centre Denmark (ICDK) in Silicon Valley and Boston and the Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science.

## **About the project**

'Designing a happier student life for better learning' is an internationally focused project on how to 'design' a better student life, increase student well-being and thus create optimal conditions for better learning. The project draws on the knowledge and experience of prominent US universities working on the well-being agenda and leading experts in the field.

A growing body of evidence shows that student well-being is essential to education and student success. Knowing how student mental health is a key parameter to academic and personal success in education, it is disturbing to see the increasing evidence of the opposite: in a recent national survey of Danish students, 48% reported feeling stressed, and 22-26% felt lonely.

The project 'Designing a happier student life for better learning' is about working systematically on improving mental health and building strong and healthy minds that can develop and be resilient.

Innovation Centre Denmark in Silicon Valley and Innovation Centre Denmark in Boston have brought in international perspective and inspiration from US research, initiatives and key experts.

The project targets Danish higher education institutions and relevant internal and external resources involved in student life and well-being, such as student counsellors, faculty, student organisations and top management.

You can read more about the project (in Danish) here: [ufm.dk/designing-a-happier-student-life](http://ufm.dk/designing-a-happier-student-life), where you can also find other case descriptions (in English) and relevant material about the project's activities.

# INTRODUCTION

Denmark has an international reputation of being consistently ranked as one of the top three happiest nations in international well-being surveys (e.g. World Happiness Report). The global narrative that Danes are the happiest people in the world has become a brand that is exported to the world. The happiness and well-being among Danes can perhaps be explained by how the society is constructed. Every Dane, from the moment they are born, can expect a rich welfare system that offers a range of services, i.e. free health services and free education.

Despite Denmark ranking traditionally high on the list of the world's happiest countries, the present global trend of rising poor mental health especially of the youth, has not avoided Denmark. One out of five students in Denmark report feeling stressed, and one out of ten students in Denmark report feeling lonely throughout their life in higher education.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Student Counselling Service in Denmark (Studenterrådgivningen), who offer courses and workshops for both educators and students, report that in 2021 they have given counselling to more than 6,850 students, individually, in groups, or via workshops, which is an increase compared to 2019 where the number was 5,500 and in 2020 where the number was 6,000.<sup>2</sup> Despite this, the majority of students in higher education in Denmark is coping well. Promoting and educating mental health for this population can improve the well-being of all students and prevent poor mental health for the minority at risk.

This phenomenon is also rising in an American context as a survey shows that in 2021 more than four in ten students felt persistently sad or hopeless and nearly one-third experienced poor mental health.<sup>3</sup> Thus, more initiatives in the United States are targeted at improving students' mental health and well-being, as research has shown that the well-being of students has a huge impact on their educational journey and how successful they become in academic performance, achievements, critical thinking, and problem solving.<sup>4</sup> Numerous American studies and data show that happy individuals are successful across multiple life domains, including marriage, friendship, income, work performance, and health. When students are feeling happy, are experiencing a sense of belonging and feel seen, they are more likely to successfully develop concentration and motivation levels, as well as coping skills for life to overcome difficulties, resilience, better relationships with others and overall higher academic attainment.

This Outlook report will focus on the improvement of well-being and health promoting initiatives. It will reflect initiatives focused on the sources to well-being and enhance students' resources of coping and resistance. Furthermore, it will present best practices from prominent American universities, structured by themes, and offer suggestions on how to translate and contextualize these practices into the Danish perspective. Thus, the report will entail Danish practices and present takeaways to Danish audiences on improvement of well-being and health promoting initiatives.

# HAPPINESS AND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY



Photo: izuzek for iStock

## OFFERING A COURSE ON HAPPINESS

To improve student well-being at universities, research has shown that it is possible to learn skills to become happier, which top universities in the United States have implemented. These top-rated happiness courses have a proven effect on stress reduction and overall happiness. US experts emphasize though that happiness courses cannot be organised as one-off classes. They recommend that the courses be designed to allow continuous practice for them to have the intended effect.

As positive psychology is a growing field in the US, the focus is less on easing suffering and more on improving general well-being. Professor Sonja Lyubomirsky, a psychology professor at the University of California, Riverside, has demonstrated how happiness is conscious, intentional, and something people can pursue. She argues that people can boost their well-being via interventions, positive activities, and deliberate behaviours and maintain that boost in the long term. American universities are tapping into this growing body of scientific research on what makes people happy and exploring how they can use this research actively in their education. To this end, there is a significant increase in top universities offering specific courses on well-being to provide students with the necessary tools to improve their happiness.

## POPULARITY AND IMPACT

In 2008, Stanford University introduced a course dedicated to enhancing student happiness. The course quickly gained popularity and, during previous semesters professors Fred Luskin and Carole Pertofsky measured stress levels among students at the beginning and end of the course. Upon completion, students reported a 27% decrease in stress levels. Professor Luskin emphasizes that the course teaches theory and improves overall well-being. In a society where social media can amplify feelings of unhappiness, this course has become increasingly sought-after in recent years. It reflects a growing awareness of the importance of self-care.



***The most important thing, however, is perhaps that the students do not only learn the theory, they feel better and get healthier***

*– Professor Fred Luskin, Stanford University*

This is one of many happiness courses offered at Stanford University. The university's location in Silicon Valley has made it a hub for entrepreneurs. Tapping into this innovative mindset, the university now provides another course that teaches students to apply design thinking to the 'wicked problem' of creating fulfilling lives and careers. The university has one in six undergraduates attending the course 'Designing Your Life' at Stanford d.school. This course utilises a design thinking methodology to assist students from any field create a positive and productive plan for discovering and designing their career paths after their time at Stanford.<sup>5</sup>

At Harvard University, Professor Tal Ben-Shahar's course 'Positive Psychology 1504' was one of the most significant courses in the university's history. Heavily inspired by the Harvard course, professor at Yale University, Laurie Santos, developed the course 'Psychology and the Good Life' in 2018, which was the most popular course in the university's 320-year history. More than 1,200 undergraduate students enrolled for the first semester. To increase the accessibility of the course, Yale has also launched a free online version of the class named 'The Science of Well-Being.'<sup>6</sup> With the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 3.4 million people enrolled in the course online.

University of California Berkeley also offers an all-online happiness course: 'The Science of Happiness',<sup>7</sup> where students discover how cutting-edge research can apply to their lives. More than 550,000 students have registered for it so far. One might question, if taking an online course about the science of happiness, in fact, can make you happier. According to UC Berkeley, it can. During the course, students' subjective happiness and life satisfaction increased by about 5%, and this boost remained even four months after the course completion.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that 'happiness' as a colloquial term can also be expressed by words like well-being, flourishing, fulfilment or thriving. Or, as expressed by Professor Sonja Lyubomirsky: *...the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile.*

# WHAT DO YOU LEARN IN A HAPPINESS COURSE?

The above-mentioned courses offer insights into the newest psychological theory and practical applications. In short, these courses assist the students in figuring out what a happy life looks like and teaches them scientifically tested strategies to achieve that goal. The happiness course at Yale is, for instance, structured around three main themes:

1. What does not bring happiness and challenges some of our common misconceptions of what we think matters for our happiness, our expectations of happiness, and how to overcome the biases.
2. What does lead to happiness and what research shows we really should strive for to live a satisfying life.
3. How to rewire our brains, change our perceptions about happiness and implement the learnings to hack our happiness and to make a difference in our communities.

Specifically in rewiring our brains, professor Fred Luskin explains that 'gratitude' and 'compassion' have been designated gateway skills of happiness, yet our brain is hardwired to focus on the negative instead of the positive. However, performing specific gratitude and optimism exercises have shown to boost happiness by making people perceive their life events more positively. Furthermore, the shift in perspectives and adapting the brain to practice gratitude consistently is reported to improve immune systems and lessen depression, enhance stronger relationships and more generous behaviour, less feelings of loneliness and isolation, and bring more joy, optimism, and happiness.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, the happiness courses present the students with positive psychology theory and exercises to help rewire the brain and facilitate behavioural change. In this way, students not only learn the theory but also must apply it in practice with exercises such as gratitude journaling, reaction essays, meditation, and reflection breaks.

Professor Laurie Santos teaches Yale's aforementioned happiness course. Reflecting on the success of the course, Santos adds that many people mistakenly believe that they need to change their entire life to be happier, yet simple acts like making a new acquaintance or taking time to be in the present moment play a much more significant part. While the teachings of the class are primarily based on the actual science of happiness, homework practices are more untraditional. Students are asked to sleep more, meditate, and perform random acts of kindness in their spare time. For this reason, students jokingly refer to the course as the 'hardest class at Yale.' An almost exact copy of the class was taught in Bristol in the United Kingdom. They found that the course helped prevent the overall drop in well-being that typically happens to students later in the semester. The course is still relatively new, so it is difficult to determine if the students' boost in well-being comes from learning the material taught in the course or is due to alternative practices and assignments. Many students have self-reported that the course helped them; some even stated that it has been life changing.





Photo: William Potter for iStock

## TIME

Another essential aspect of Professor Santos' course are time management practices and procrastination prevention. She calls this exercise 'time affluence', where students are asked what they would do if they had extra time. Professor Santos explains that time plays a significant role in happiness among students. One example is, the idiom 'time is money' is well known, but the comparison does not hold. In particular, money has a readily exchangeable market and can be saved and borrowed across periods, which is not the case with time. Whereas a loss of USD 100 today has the potential of being earned back tomorrow, a lost hour cannot be recuperated, and the 24 hours comprising each day renew every morning. Similarly, with the 525,600 minutes comprising each year. Therefore, people are more averse to the risk of losing or wasting their time than their money.<sup>2</sup>

The vital role time plays in happiness is not only an exercise targeted at students and faculty. Professor Santos teaches how it is crucial to force yourself to have free time and set more strict boundaries regarding your own time, which she calls 'idle time'. For us to have an emotional surplus, function in the world, and navigate many tasks and shifting environments, we need to prioritise idle time. The earlier students learn about this, the better they will become at structuring their time and reflecting on how good time management can bring them happiness.

# POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

Apart from introducing happiness courses as optional parts of the curriculum in the higher educational system in the US, positive psychology has also gained momentum in the classroom. More and more tools from psychology are being incorporated to design better teaching material that supports and engages the students. As a professor, you need to be well-versed in the subject you teach and consider human interaction and the class setup. Looking into the human mind (biologically, psychologically, and sociologically) and understanding how we process information and engage in social relationships greatly help create a better educational setting.

Professor Carol Dweck, professor of psychology at Stanford University, writes, *Students who believe their intelligence can be developed (a growth mindset) outperform those who believe their intelligence is fixed (a fixed mindset)*. Professor Dweck and her colleagues have discovered that how students perceive their abilities is vital to their motivation and achievement.<sup>10</sup>

According to Professor Dweck, intelligence is not fixed, and educators can become better at fostering a growth mindset and encouraging students to perceive their abilities in a different light. Below is an example of how to engage with students based on Professor Dweck's research.

## HOW TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS

### Growth Mindset

WHAT TO SAY:

*"When you learn how to do a new kind of problem, it grows your math brain!"*

### Fixed Mindset

WHAT NOT TO SAY:

*"Not everybody is good at math. Just do your best."*

Installing a growth mindset often entails changes and interventions, and to create a happier student life, these changes and interventions may be necessary. Psychologically, interventions aim to encourage people to act and perceive the world in more positive ways, and while they may seem overwhelming, they do not have to be intense or theatrical. According to Associate Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, Greg Walton, 'wise' interventions are small daily interactions that can reshape how people make sense of themselves, the world around them, and society at large—for instance, shaping your feeling of belongingness or lack thereof. In this way, these small interventions are something that we do every single day, maybe in every interaction – like motivating our students to do their homework, and eventually, the interventions significantly impact our lives and well-being.

## FOUR TECHNIQUES OF INTERVENTION

1. **DIRECT LABELLING** – label a group with an identity; the group is likelier to behave according to that identity. For instance, telling a class that they are ‘an active class’ increases the amount they discuss more, than only encouraging them to participate more.
2. **PROMPTING** – leading question intervention; giving people new information that provides a basis for reconsidering their answer but without directly telling people what the answer is. E.g., asking students to consider how specific course material might be helpful in their next job instead of telling them it is.
3. **ACTIVE REFLECTION** – open-ended reflection exercises; exercises, where students can reflect on their own experiences without being provided with new information. E.g., gratitude journaling.
4. **INCREASING COMMITMENT THROUGH ACTION** – giving someone information and making them explain it to a group of peers; when students share and present, they become more committed when they share and explain. In this way, they become active co-creators.

Interventions that originate in a basic understanding of social psychological processes aim to help people reach their goals and achieve better outcomes. Professor Walton has identified four methods of ‘wise’ interventions that can be used to create positive behaviour change, thereby improving health, well-being, and relationships.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TEAMWORK IN HAPPINESS



***The happiest college students (the top 10%) have been shown to have high-quality social relationships***

*– Professor Sonja Lyubomirski, Laura King & Ed Diener, 2005<sup>11</sup>*

Teamwork in and outside the classroom is rewarding and plays a large part in providing students with a comprehensive, well-rounded education. Teamwork is also a great tool to ensure that students are connecting with each other, thereby creating these important personal relations.

Studies of students who have taken classes in which they engage in team-based projects show that learning about teaming is high on their list of critical takeaways - both at the end of the semester and several years after graduation. Team or group work in a classroom teaches students fundamental skills associated with working as a collective unit toward a common goal and, at the same time, also helps socialise with other students.

Student teamwork introduces various skills that will be valuable for students later in the workforce, such as communication, compromise, and collective effort. In any group work, students must agree on who will handle various project components and work in tandem using each other's strengths to accomplish assigned tasks. This teaches time management, resource allocation, and communication skills.

When designing a course, many factors are important to keep in mind. Professor in the Bioengineering Department at the University of California Berkeley, Terry D. Johnson, who is also the recipient of the Golden Apple Award for Outstanding Teaching and UC Berkeley's Distinguished Teaching Award, highlights three focus areas:



**Setting the norm**



**Facilitating teamwork**



**Keeping syllabi relevant**

Setting the norm in the classroom from day one and sticking to it is the key to a well-structured class. Setting the norm involves getting the students comfortable with a professional norm, expecting active engagement, and teaching them how to deal with challenges. Active learning is vital: getting the students involved in the learning process instead of being passive recipients. However, active learning can be uncomfortable for new and insecure students, requiring more effort, so setting it as a norm from the beginning is essential.

Teamwork is a great tool to get discussions going while allowing the students to relate to the subject together. For instance, Professor Johnson highlights the importance of facilitating peer learning by using the resources provided by 'Teaming by Design', which is an approach developed by the Berkeley Haas School of Business. It focuses on building effective and innovative teams with the aim to prepare students to collaborate in solving significant problems across various disciplines. The goal is to enhance self-awareness, the ability to work interdisciplinarily and in collaborative teams to achieve complex goals. This helps the educators to create teams that are more adaptable, innovative, creative solution-oriented and resilient, which are skills that will foster innovative change and prove useful in the students' professional lives. Moreover, the 'Teaming by Design' toolkit integrates academic research and industry best practices, utilizing design methods and exercises to create a stimulating learning environment.<sup>12</sup>



Photo: miniseries for iStock

Furthermore, research suggests that diversity in teams fosters productivity and innovation: World Economic Forum's *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion 4.0* report states that organisations with diverse workforces enjoy 'up to 20% higher rate of creativity and 19% higher revenue from innovation'.<sup>13</sup>

“**Diverse workforces enjoy 'up to 20% higher rate of creativity and 19% higher revenue from innovation'**<sup>13</sup>

In his research, Professor Scott E. Page, University of Minnesota, argues that diversity outweighs skill on teams - especially when teams are challenged to innovate or work on very complex problems. Professor Page has constructed a mathematically formal model that shows this. The diversification allows the groups to explore a broader solution space, avoid cognitive biases, and generate more innovative and effective outcomes. In this sense, diversity is either 'diversity in perspectives' or 'diversity in heuristics'. 'Diversity in perspectives' helps a team to collectively see the numerous sides of a problem from different points of view; 'diversity in heuristics' offers a team a variety of alternative approaches to solve challenges and problems. Thus, teaming is innately connected to the ability to frame and solve problems as teams and ultimately to drive organisational learning and change.<sup>14</sup>



Photo: PeoplesImages for iStock

# THE DANISH CONTEXT



There are differences between the Danish and American educational systems that need to be considered if designing similar courses about happiness in a Danish context. Danish universities give more specialized undergraduate programmes, whereas American undergraduate students generally can follow courses from different disciplines and institutes. Nonetheless, one can imagine various institutional set-ups: educational institutions can offer the course as a voluntary non-credit course, some faculties might consider offering it as a credit-giving course for their students, etc. Professor Fred Luskin stresses the importance of designing the course in a way that makes it more than a two-hour class:

**“*Make it a sequence, something that they have to keep up with throughout the whole college period*”**

*– Professor Fred Luskin, Stanford University*

Professor Luskin points out various ways to organise such a course: it can be designed as a proper course running an entire semester; it can be a seminar at the beginning of every quarter or just a weekly happiness break and exercise. Happiness skills are not constant but must be practiced continuously to have a lasting effect. A course offering could be more effective if reflecting this fact. It would be ideal, if happiness (or well-being) research could be seamlessly integrated into higher education as an important and natural aspect of pedagogy, with a focus on both knowledge and practical application.

# REIMAGINING THE CLASSROOM

The design and functionality of physical spaces matter for well-being and learning outcomes. A good design of the physical space can reduce student fatigue, improve performance, enhance a sense of belonging and promote student collaboration. Design strategies can be used in educational spaces to overcome spatial constraints and foster active learning. Combined with supporting technologies, it can greatly impact today's classrooms and lecture halls and make them better spaces for learning.

In 2019, Stanford University initiated the project 'Stanford Classrooms Reimagined' to develop a master plan for classrooms and informal learning spaces. The project aimed to prepare the planning and design of learning spaces for the next decade. Research shows that students today learn differently from earlier generations. They increasingly expect to be actively engaged in the learning process, both in the classroom and throughout campus.

Stanford University's project addresses this development by focusing on the educational environment. It has produced several findings and suggestions on how to adapt to the surroundings students find themselves in.

Stanford University's efforts to improve the life of students and, thereby, the quality of education is highly important. This chapter shares some of the project's initial results and related insights. The findings and proposed strategies may inspire Danish higher education institutions with similar deliberations. The findings from the Stanford project add to research from the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, which shows that the mere presence of plants in an office space enhances a person's ability to focus.

With most of our lives spent indoors, our space has a significant role in shaping our behaviour. In the *Psychology of Space*, section of ArchDaily, an architecture platform gathering key developments within the field, architect Christele Harrouk writes about the importance of design and functionality for well-being. *Lighting, colours, configuration, scale, proportions, acoustics, and materials address the individual's senses and generate a spectrum of feelings and practices*, Harrouk writes.<sup>15</sup>



Photo: Dom Four/Unsplash

# THE IMPACT OF PHYSICAL SPACE



Innovation Centre Denmark interviewed Richard Webber, Associate Vice Provost & CTO of Learning Technologies and Spaces, and Helen Chu, Senior Director of Learning Spaces, who runs the 'Classrooms Reimagined' project at Stanford. They both highlight that by focusing on physical space, the goal is to lift the learning experience to a higher level and to improve the conditions for all students - also the ones we often characterise as well-functioning.

The project has produced several exciting findings emphasising the need to rethink classrooms. In one of the studies, they find that 81% of faculty members say they must adapt their teaching and teaching methods to the specific room that is available to them.<sup>16</sup> This clearly shows the importance of the physical space and how it eventually determines – not only the teaching – but also the learning.



***Space can shape behavior – why not shape it for the positive?***

*– Helen Chu, Senior Director, Learning Spaces Stanford University*

Effective teaching is often a challenging task, even for experienced professors who strive to make their lessons more dynamic and interactive - for instance, by switching from lecture to group discussion mode. Only 9% of Stanford's classrooms support such changes, reducing the quality of group discussions more than it may have been in a more open and adaptable space. Furthermore, the students surveyed in the study indicate that they want to be taught in classrooms that inspire them. More specifically, they are asking for spaces with air, natural light, and movable furniture – all of which allow them to engage better and connect with fellow students and the educator.





Photo: D Home Team at Stanford

In their effort to bring space into consideration, Stanford and other universities are constrained by limited space and resources. Thus, part of the project is focused on how to utilize limited space best. Stanford University commits to small classes (25 or less), which fosters a team feeling - connecting faculty and students. However, the most important work for the faculty, Richard Webber and Helen Chu stated, is creating a sense of belonging for the students.

A sense of belonging is a key factor in a fulfilling student life. It is important to think about how people can interact in the space that they are in. A way of facilitating interaction and group work is to make the space adaptable to different activities. The less hassle one must go through to set up and arrange for an activity, the more often it will occur in everyday teaching. So, what is the best way to encourage interaction in the classroom?

Helen Chu emphasizes active learning as a driver of interaction. Active learning involves teaching strategies that allow students to build their knowledge. More specifically, students are engaged in the learning process through activities that include writing, discussing, reflecting, experimenting or problem-solving – as opposed to just passively listening, according to a definition by the University of Minnesota<sup>17</sup>. However, active learning needs the right physical conditions to reach its potential and improve learning outcomes fully.

# DESIGN STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVE LEARNING



The setup at Stanford University already partly fosters active engagement with smaller classes and close connections between professors and students. However, the physical space must still be considered. Thus, Chu has outlined five design strategies to facilitate better active learning, where the focus is on adapting the classroom or educational environment at hand rather than building new ones.

## DESIGNING A SPACE THAT ENCOURAGES INTERACTION

1. **Use** the space you have
2. **Remove barriers** to active learning
3. **Design a more inclusive** environment
4. **Use** the space to foster a sense of **belonging**
5. **Promote eye contact** and community

You can hear Helen Chu talk about design strategies in a webinar on Macmillan Learning.<sup>18</sup>

These design strategies are also relevant for classes in a space with many students, such as a more classic setup like a lecture hall with immovable rows and seats. A simple example that Helen Chu gives is to make group work happen by having students stand up and move to aisles and other areas of the lecture hall despite the room not encouraging it. It also makes sense to make the walls writable by hanging large sticky notes for students to check their own and each other's understandings. In short, if the barriers to active learning cannot be removed or changed physically, there are ways to transgress the limitations and foster active learning. If resources allow, altering the classic lecture hall by bringing in tables and comfortable chairs works well. It can create a sense of belonging, inclusion, and community, as students and professors can easily engage and move around.

# NEW SUPPORTING TECHNOLOGIES



Classrooms and the use of technology have been and will continue to develop as electronics have an increased presence in teaching and studying. This development has been amplified as Stanford University and schools worldwide had to adapt to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Richard Webber and Helen Chu learned that the students need a support system for the technology they are expected to use at school. Generally, it is assumed that younger generations do not need technical support, which is a risky assumption to make. IT and other technologies are constantly evolving, and even students who have grown up with technology can struggle to figure out systems and platforms like Blackboard, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams.

Technology has great potential when used mindfully, particularly in supporting learning environments. Some universities use technology as a tool to support their classrooms, while others use it as the primary setup. Harvard University has been offering live online classrooms since 2015, and in the summer of 2020, an improved HBX live classroom was launched. HBX is an extensive audio-visual technology where a virtual classroom is designed to reproduce the intimacy and synchronous interaction and carefully considered to promote active learning and create an experience similar to a physical classroom.

For instance, each of the 96 students is displayed on an individual screen, and the screens are all placed next to each other while a camera follows the professor. Harvard University discovered that the ability to see the instructor moving around the classroom, writing on the board, and taking questions, improved the student experience of being in a virtual classroom. With these supporting technological solutions, technology can be used to maintain the integrity of the classroom experience in remote learning.

# EDUCATIONAL SPACES ON THE AGENDA IN THE UNITED STATES



Photo: skynesher for iStock

Stanford and Harvard University are not alone in recognising the importance of a reimagined classroom with active learning and technology at its core. According to an article in the Hechinger Report, a recognised non-profit media outlet covering measures to improve education in the US, many schools are experimenting with classroom design.<sup>19</sup> The idea behind this is to accommodate the multitude of ways that students learn and different teaching methods.

For instance, a study by the Iowa State University examined the use of an active learning space. They found that various audio-visual tools had a positive effect on student engagement. The possibility to walk around the room and make use of tools such as portable whiteboards, Apple TV, LCD panel video projectors, large writing surfaces, and flat-panel monitors opened a space for instructors to check how much the students had understood, but more importantly for students to check their understanding - both via the technology and interaction.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, the students at Iowa State University felt that the active learning classroom design 'erased the line' between instructors and students. The design encouraged interaction, which meant students felt a closer personal connection to their instructor and fellow students. Ultimately this created a sense of community and enhanced student engagement. The study itself emphasises that educational institutions are highly aware of the effect well-designed classrooms can have on learning outcomes, while the results emphasise a demand from students that educational spaces are reimagined. The research shows that we should be mindful of how we design the spaces around us because physical spaces matter for well-being and learning outcomes.



Photo: Mikael Kristensen/Unsplash

## THE DANISH CONTEXT

Several initiatives in higher education in terms of designing physical spaces have also been implemented in a Danish context. Our surroundings affect how we behave, interact, and feel, which is particularly important in work and study environments, where efficiency and knowledge intake are essential. In order to create more effective learning environments, universities have introduced a range of initiatives, such as group work options, creative spaces for brainstorming, and innovation labs for entrepreneurial students. Examples include the Science Hub at the University of Copenhagen, Skylab at the Technical University of Denmark (DTU), and InnovationLab at Copenhagen Business Academy. Additionally, some schools have developed advanced media labs for journalism, photography, and TV production, such as the Danish School of Media and Journalism. In addition to physical spaces, higher education institutions are also redesigning their campuses to create a more cohesive, community-focused environment. One example is the 'Art, Nature & Technology' programme at DTU, which aims to contextualize the university's scientific focus by incorporating art projects into campus development. The programme has a 2020-2025 action plan that includes ten proposals for art installations in seven indoor and outdoor spaces on campus. These projects aim to give students a sense of identity and community while they learn.<sup>21</sup>

# SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONING FOR STUDENTS



Photo: Rawpixel for iStock

An important factor in student well-being are transitioning phases, as these, psychologically, play a critical and significant role in the level of well-being among students. The transitions from high school to higher education level teaching, from bachelor's level to graduate level and from being graduated into the job market can be challenging in many ways, especially adapting, and decoding to new norms and cultures. Transitions can lead to feelings of insecurity regarding own competencies, expectations and belonging. To mitigate this, some American universities use a 'co-op model' to address transitional challenges through close partnerships with companies and industries to alleviate uncertainty about the transferability of skills and prospects, and some higher education institutions offer career counselling to provide students with tools to manage anxiety and decision-making related to career development. These tools can ease the transition, but another key tool are 'mindset interventions', a concept used within social psychology that aims to reduce the experience of being alone, not belonging and being inadequate.

The leading universities in Silicon Valley and Boston, such as Stanford University, University of California Berkeley, Harvard University, and Yale University, all work closely with various industries by providing experiences that can help students alleviate some of their concerns and uncertainty. Besides career counselling, such experiences might be industry-scholarship programmes, student-industry labs, and network facilitation.

# STUDENT COUNSELLING AND CAREER SERVICES

Investment in mental health counselling is growing in the US. A new report conducted by the Californian Legislative Office provides an overview of California's state funding of mental health services.<sup>22</sup> For the year 2021-2022, it has been reported that the University of California Schools have received 20 million USD, the California State Universities 15 million USD, and California Community Colleges 30 million USD, amounting to 65.3 million USD total spend on mental health services. This is a large increase compared to 2019-2020 – pre-pandemic and the first stages of the pandemic, where only 15.3 million USD were allocated to this area. Several studies have pointed to a hesitancy among the student body to utilise on-campus services due to stigma around mental health and/or a failure to recognise the potential value of such counselling. Yet, the tide seems to be changing as more students struggle with mental health issues and are willing to talk about their struggles more openly.<sup>23</sup> There is a rise in approaches where higher education institutions focus on shifting away from reductionist illness-oriented approaches towards health-promoting initiatives, enhancing student well-being and fostering resilience.



***Counselling allows students to express their insecurities and get tools to deal with the uncertainty of the future***

*– Sarah Brown, The Chronicle of Higher Education*

According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*,<sup>24</sup> there has been a notable increase in the number of students who are seeking assistance from campus counselling centres in recent years. This influx in demand has led to waitlists being established at many of these centres and is proving to be a challenge for the respective colleges. The reason behind this surge in demand is attributed to overwhelmed students who are seeking help and support. As a consequence, this situation is exerting pressure on the resources and services provided by the institutions.

Counselling allows students to express their insecurities and get tools to deal with the uncertainty of the future. Moreover, counselling can also encompass career counselling, explicitly targeting students' abilities to make career decisions. The goal is to help students now and give them the knowledge and skills to make life decisions and build a future career. Such services can help foster realistic expectations and preparedness for life after graduation among college seniors and help mitigate students' anxiety about the future. Some US universities have recognized that career development is a process that continues after graduation. The University of San Francisco grants free unlimited services from the Career Services Centre for the first year after graduation to continue supporting the students throughout this transition. One-year post-graduation, alums are allowed one complimentary one-hour career counselling appointment yearly.

# FROM STUDENT TO YOUNG PROFESSIONAL

In a report by the Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research at the University of Massachusetts, many college seniors report the transition to an independent and self-sufficient life to be anxiety-provoking and overwhelming.<sup>25</sup>

Transitioning from student to employee can be challenging in several ways and difficult to manage socially. Students are used to a social educational setting with other similar-aged people. However, when entering the workforce, many will have to adjust to a different social environment where they work with acquaintances rather than close friends. This lack of an immediate support network around you can be challenging to adjust to.



***Many college seniors report the transition to an independent and self-sufficient life to be anxiety-provoking and overwhelming***

*– Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research at University of Massachusetts*

Uncertainty and anxiety are not only limited to the period of job search. The ambiguity of what life will look like post-graduation can also be a considerable stress factor. When students graduate and join the workforce, many have little knowledge of what it means to be an employee as opposed to a student, having spent the vast majority of their lives so far receiving education. While some students hit the ground running, others find the change challenging, as these transitions may invite existential thoughts in adapting to this new identity going from a student to a young professional.

The social psychology practice mindset interventions have positively increased students' social- and academic performance, especially among minority groups. However, the practice also resonates with students who experience perfectionism and imposter syndrome. This section displays different institutional arrangements and ways of cooperating with the industry while paying attention to aspects of student well-being that can serve as an inspiration to Danish stakeholders.



Photo: miniserles for iStock



Educational and corporate cultures differ in many ways. For instance, where students' primary challenges were intellectual, they now realize that most challenges that companies face are organisational and/or people centred. Students also report a shift from a focus on personal development to a focus on creating results for an organisation. However, students leave the educational setting in search of their identity, which is often manifested in the exploration of a meaningful career. Finding out what is meaningful and gaining a sense of belonging can be a long and challenging process.<sup>26</sup> This can cause frustration and general unhappiness as former students try to situate themselves in this new life. It is thus important for higher education institutions to motivate and support students in pivotal moments throughout college in preparation for the transition to the workplace.

In the table below, it is illustrated where graduates perceive differences between college and the workplace looking at 15 different parameters.

<b>GRADUATES' PERCEIVED DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COLLEGE AND WORKPLACE</b>	
<b>COLLEGE</b>	<b>WORKPLACE</b>
Frequent and concrete feedback	Feedback infrequent and not concrete
Some freedom to set a schedule	Less freedom or control over schedule
Frequent breaks and time off	Limited time off
Choose performance level	"A" level work expected continuously
Correct answers usually available	Few right answers
Passive participation permitted	Active participation and initiative expected
Independent thinking supported	Independent thinking often discouraged
Environment of personal support	Usually less personal support
Focus on personal development	Focus on getting result for organization
Structured courses and curriculum	Much less structure: fewer directions
Few changes in routine	Often constant and unexpected changes
Personal control over time	Responds to supervisor's directions
Individual effort and performance	Often, team effort and performance
Intellectual challenge	Organizational and people challenge
Professors	Supervisor

# UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRY COLLABORATIONS



Photo: sanjert for iStock

According to collaborative research from three American universities, career development encompasses many skills vital to graduate students' success but is often not included under this umbrella as mental health.<sup>27</sup> However, research shows that *one of the major sources of anxiety centres on skill development, identification, and application.*<sup>28</sup>

Some American universities have forged close partnerships with the industry to alleviate the struggles and minimise the distance between a student and life as an employee.<sup>29</sup> Such close connections can benefit students as they give them an entry point into various industries. In the US, it is notoriously difficult for students to land a job in their preferred sector, making university-industry collaborations attractive and making such jobs more attainable.<sup>30</sup> These industry collaborations with higher education also allow the students to imagine themselves in a workforce situation, validating the usefulness of their academic skills and boosting their confidence. University-industry cooperation can take many forms. Internships offer students a low-pressure entry into their field and can be a way to prepare them for their professional future.

Research shows that students with internship experience can better develop realistic expectations for the workplace. In the US, it is common for students to do a summer internship with a company or organisation. This is often made possible through their university's vast industrial and corporate network and is thus more university-driven than in Denmark. Another type of collaboration happens through specific programmes or courses involving an industrial or corporate partner. It is common for industry professionals to teach classes at American universities, which helps narrow the gap between higher education and industry. Colleges can also seek employer input on course design to better prepare students for the workforce.

Career boot camps are another approach to help college students gain experience of being in the workplace. Institutions such as Dartmouth College, Middlebury College, the University of California Berkeley, and private businesses have created short-term boot camp programmes to provide students real-world work experiences while still enrolled in college. These boot camps<sup>31</sup> often teach in-demand skills and put students through a rigorous real-world project that a local employer commissions. This is supplemented by career coaching, allowing students to practice their business skills with instant feedback. Bringing industries and universities closer together might alleviate some of the struggles experienced by students as they enter the workforce. Such partnerships could potentially ensure a smoother and less ambiguous transition to the workforce as the students are more knowledgeable about future work expectations. One example is the cooperative education model at Northeastern University, where students experience the 'real world' before graduating by alternating semesters of academic study with semesters of full-time employment. The model has created results with 50% of the university's students receiving a job offer from their previous co-op employer and 90% of graduates either getting a job or enrolling in further studies within nine months of graduating.<sup>32</sup>

Another example are partnerships between students and start-ups at UC Berkeley, where industry professionals help accelerate the commercialization and provide mentorship to students from various disciplines. The programme is an excellent opportunity for students from a wide array of academic disciplines to connect with future employers and gain hands-on experience. At the same time, the guidance and mentorship ensure a smoother transition from being a student to working.<sup>33</sup>

## AMERICAN 'MINDSET INTERVENTIONS'

Research in the USA has shown remarkable performance gaps between students who feel a sense of belonging with their educational institutions and those who do not share that experience.<sup>34</sup> The performance gap is especially noticeable between minority groups and the overrepresented group as elaborated in the next chapter.<sup>35</sup> In general, the transitional phases, from bachelor to master's degree or from student to young professional, test the students' experience of belonging with their education or new workplace, increasing the experience of inadequacies.<sup>36</sup>

### FACTS

The 'College Transition Collaborative' bridges research and practice to help colleges create learning environments that foster equitable student engagement and success. Their mission is to help institutions understand how their students experience moments of transition and how specific messages, practices, and programmes can be helpful. Greg Walton, Associate Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, is one of the founders.

When the experience of belonging is threatened – either socially or academically – everyday educational situations such as eating lunch alone or receiving constructive feedback from a professor will be perceived by students as a sign of *I can't make friends here, I don't belong* or *All the other students are performing better than me* or *All the other students are performing better than me*. These intrusive feelings result in negative behavioural patterns such as procrastination or other coping strategies. To combat the performance gap, Stanford Professor Greg Walton has developed a toolbox with mindset interventions as the key component. The interventions have statistically improved student well-being, student performance and retention compared to students who have not participated in mindset interventions.<sup>37</sup>

For students, the mindset interventions consist of a session at the very beginning of a transition phase, where they engage with senior students without knowing the purpose of the session.<sup>38</sup> The senior students then share their experiences of transition and feelings of not belonging and how that is a common and temporary evolving experience for all despite ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Doing so minimises the misperception of students as being alone with their challenges. For institutions, on the other hand, mindset interventions require the ability to develop educational environments that foster inclusive experiences for students and structurally change the prevailing norms and practices that leads to minority groups' experiences of not belonging.<sup>39</sup>



Photo: Jacob Lund for iStock

# THE DANISH CONTEXT



Positive psychology and mindset interventions are also practised by the Danish Student Counselling Service, where they recently have seen a rising tendency of students experiencing the need to perform perfectly both socially and academically. Perfectionism can manifest itself to such a degree that students end up experiencing imposter syndrome, a persistent doubt about their skills, talents, and accomplishments leading to a constant fear of being exposed as a fraud.<sup>40</sup>

According to the Department Head of The Danish Student Counselling Service, Jesper Madsen, a very large group of Danish students' experience perfectionism and imposter syndrome to such an extent that it is relevant to discuss the phenomenon as 'pluralistic ignorance'. Pluralistic ignorance refers to when the majority of the students feel like they do not perform as well socially and academically as their peers, an experience that is often enhanced by students believing that they are alone with their experience, he states: *The experience of not belonging or performing adequately in a social and academic context is not limited to the minority but is a characteristic of the majority as well.*

The Danish Student Counselling Service offers 'study start' workshops to smoothen the transition from high school to higher education, applying the 'wise' interventions approach. They moreover offer an 'Institutional Check-up', which entails workshops facilitated by psychologists where institutions are introduced to tools that will help education managers, educators, students and student advisors to increase student well-being and create healthy performance environments for the students in the particular education. Moreover, they offer a follow-up where various themes and relevant issues or challenges specific to the institution are discussed, thus offering tailor-made recommendations and initiatives for the future. In addition to this, the Student Counselling Service offers the opportunity to discuss post-reflections.<sup>41</sup>

As Danish and American students experience the same challenges, mindset interventions can be relevant to include in institutional strategies. Hence, the educational system would be going forward to improve - not only the transition to the workplace - but also the students' overall well-being as they turn into young professionals. Many higher education institutions in Denmark already support the possibility of an internship and have industry partnerships. It could be a low-hanging fruit to also consider these programmes from a mental health perspective and be more attentive to and explicit about how these programmes can serve as a way of validating skills and managing expectations.

# GENDER AND DIVERSITY: IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

In most of the world, higher education is open and accessible to everyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religious beliefs or disabilities. Nonetheless, research shows a systematic performance gap for those students who do not experience a feeling of belonging or social connectedness in the educational system, despite being formally welcomed by their respective institutions and peers. The performance gap belongs to the research field of 'educational equity', covering the study and measuring of achievement, fairness, and opportunity in education. This section will present key findings and hands-on tools to improve educational equity, based on spearheading American universities' research and based on an exclusive Innovation Centre Denmark interview with Psychology Professor Greg Walton at the Department of Psychology, Stanford University.



## SELF-REGULATION, A KEY TO WELL-BEING

Attending higher education is becoming a mainstream experience, with an increasingly diverse student composition pursuing degrees within various fields. The diversity spurs new experiences and perceptions of learning spaces and life in higher education, sometimes leading to feelings of not belonging and not fitting in, especially for minority students. These negative emotions can have consequences for students' self-regulating abilities. Addressing these disparities and fostering educational equity, especially during the transition to higher education can play a pivotal role in mitigating these negative emotions. Achieving educational equity has a significant impact on both academic performance and well-being. When students, and especially from minority backgrounds, feel excluded and face unequal access to resources and opportunities, this can affect both their academic achievements and belonging. By prioritizing educational equity and fostering social connectedness, students can thrive both academically and socially. Pursuing educational equity is therefore not only an admirable goal but also a vital requirement for creating an inclusive and supportive higher education environment that empowers all students to realize their full potential.<sup>42</sup>

According to psychology professors Greg Walton and Geoffrey Cohen from Stanford University, recognising negative emotions are essential factors influencing performance.



**Thoughts and feelings matter. They are powerful but invisible**

*- Professor Geoffrey Cohen, Stanford University<sup>43</sup>*

For the individual student, learning to reframe 'bad' events can help develop new ways of understanding events. 'Bad' in this context is subjective and a function of interpretations people draw to themselves, others, and their situations.

An example of such an event may be if you are a first-year college student spending Friday night alone. Some students may perceive this as an opportunity to rest rather than interpreting as an exclusion from the social scene. However, others might experience a Friday night alone as a social exclusion, which can be an upsetting experience.

Based on the framing used, how one makes sense of experiences and understands events can positively or negatively affect one's well-being. Professors Greg Walton and Geoff Cohen present five principles that can help reframe 'bad' events for the individual:

- 1. Encourage positive labels** - encourage a positive view of oneself. Identify factors leading to the 'bad' event, for instance, by acknowledging it is a common challenge for many people. Dismiss and forestall negative labels about own prospects and how others view oneself.
- 2. Communicate, 'You are not the only one'** - recognize others who have faced the same challenges and use their experiences to address those challenges productively.
- 3. Acknowledge the challenges and do not blame yourself** - legitimize 'bad' events as usual challenges that happen to many people and are not a reflection of their deficits, such as laziness, lack of intelligence, etc.
- 4. Forecast improvement** - emphasize the possibility for improvement and focus on process as people can fear that adverse events forecast a fixed negative future.
- 5. Recognize opportunities** - represent aspects of 'bad' events as an opportunity for growth and improvement.

For institutions, the principles offer an approach to learning how people from various backgrounds understand experiences and how the institution can change standard practices to improve outcomes for all. When initiatives on inclusion and diversity are being introduced by the institutions, it helps the students in feeling supported and promotes belonging.



An example of actively reminding students that they are not alone in their experiences, whether they are negative or positive, is the ‘Stanford University Resilience Project’. The project is an effort to normalize setbacks and help students reflect on and learn from their failures as well as to withhold from the perfectionism culture that places immense pressure on students’ well-being. The underlying assumption of the resilience project is that learning through reflecting on setbacks is vital to student success. The resilience project’s core ideas are:

- 1. Learn about learning**
- 2. Seek advice**
- 3. Get perspective**
- 4. Connect with community**

The purpose of this type of reflection is to develop resilience through learning and growing from failure.<sup>44</sup> Among many other initiatives, the project has hosted performance events commemorating and celebrating the ‘epic failures’ in our lives, where students across campus came together to share experiences in creative means. Through initiatives like these, students are reminded that they are not alone in their experiences and can shift their mindsets and rewire their perceptions.



# THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL MINDSETS ON EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

For an institution with a rich history that may date several decades back in time, the prevailing set of norms can have a negative impact on students that do not recognize themselves in the established context - often characterized by being white, male, heterosexual, and from affluent backgrounds.

According to Professor Geoffrey Cohen, the prevailing belief system of a person's context defines a person's behaviour to a certain extent. This perceived context causes achievement gaps between those students who view themselves as fitting into the educational space and those who do not, often exacerbating existing social and economic inequalities. The context and its framework are not the responsibility nor in control of the individual. This responsibility is institutional, societal, and structural. The soil must be fertile for good seeds to grow; therefore, institutions must pay attention to making the soil fertile and promote institutional contexts that will help students grow. However, the responsibility of changing mindsets lies within the individual, but it can be promoted by context.

To avoid a negative impact on minority groups, Professor Greg Walton emphasises the importance of asking, *Does this context afford a mindset change* when working towards improving educational equity.

The question implies using interventions as a helpful tool to counter stereotypes, challenge prevailing norms, and foster a sense of belonging.<sup>45</sup> The intervention can take place on different levels. On the collective level, leaders influence change in the belief system or prevailing group norm that characterises at a higher educational setting. On the individual level, each student has the agency to challenge the present context in a way that everyday narratives become inclusive.

Offering a space where different experiences can be shared and acknowledged is, fortunately, often enough to create a sense of belonging and minimise negative emotions. However, there is sadly an increasing number of instances where the feeling of not belonging is more severe due to gender oppression and/or dismissing racism.<sup>46</sup>

For the same reason, there lies a responsibility within the institutions, and they play a crucial role in combating events that provoke negative reactions. Thus, by formally learning how people understand these experiences, institutions can develop systemic changes to standard practices that embrace and respect everyone.

Harvard University is another example of a higher education institution working on tangible community building and securing safe spaces where different experiences can be shared and discussed.<sup>47</sup> According to Alexis Stokes, Associate Chief Diversity and Inclusion officer at Harvard University, these discussions must be facilitated across various disciplines, focusing on best practices and how they are implemented. Harvard University has recently implemented an innovation fund to ignite small projects in this space. It can grant funds to video series, art exhibitions, gender-free bathrooms, or support to specific minority groups, for example. This does not only promote a sense of belonging, but also a sense of safety among the students, as in a 2017 survey of 153 LGBTQ students at Harvard, 29% reported that they were feeling unsafe.<sup>48</sup> As part of this effort, Harvard continues working on various data and assessment tools to ensure the university is on the right track. Recently Harvard developed a new inclusion index, and more of these data-driven tools will come. These data-based assessments can also draw inspiration in a Danish context.<sup>49</sup>

# THE POWER OF INTERVENTIONS



Photo: FG Trade for iStock

Ultimately, the goal with interventions is to change the achievement trajectory over time, allowing the increasingly diverse student population to start on somewhat equal footing regarding their academic path, future career, and life. Specifically, working with what Professor Cohen and Professor Walton refer to as ‘wise’ psychological interventions can help institutions function more effectively in terms of diversity and inclusion.<sup>50</sup>

‘Wise’ interventions generally address how people make sense of themselves, others, or social situations and focus on mindsets rather than specific ‘bad’ events. The interventions possess an extraordinary power as they address a breadth of mindsets and help shape how people interpret and respond to whole classes of experiences.

The practice of interventions is already a part of the culture at Stanford. For instance, Stanford held a one-hour-long intervention for African American Students, where challenges to belonging in transition to college were presented as usual and improving over time. The intervention helped to change how the students interpreted their daily social events, so experiences such as difficulty making friends, receiving critical feedback, and being homesick was not a manifestation of not belonging but rather a sign of them belonging to all the other students in transition who were feeling the same.<sup>51</sup>

“**Ultimately, the racial achievement gap between White and African American students was cut in half over the next three years after the intervention, emphasizing the immense impact of feelings and mindset on performance.**

– Professor Geoffrey L. Cohen & Julio Garcia, University of Colorado



Photo: meshaphoto for iStock

## INSTITUTIONAL OBLIGATIONS GOING FORWARD

Given the power of mindset interventions, teaching students how to reframe ‘bad’ events may seem obsolete. However, although ‘wise’ interventions can be embedded productively in an institutional context, professors and other institutional actors cannot, on a day-to-day basis, reflect upon the belief systems with whom they interact. Instead, it is in the process of planning experiences and routine information that often rely on a prevailing set of norms where educational equity can be improved. This can, for instance, be within events or functions, designing the curriculum and way of teaching, or in communication, both explicit and implicit. For the same reason, institutions have a unique role and obligation to help their students make sense of their experiences. In other words, if institutions fail to help students make good sense of ‘bad’ events, the achievement gap will not be improved, and educational equity not be achieved.

**When planning experiences, please be aware of the belief system with which they interact.**

This could be within

- Events, functions, or rituals
- Spaces
- Food
- Communication
- Groupings
- Schedules and rhythms

Often these include a prevailing set of norms, that might not be applicable for a diverse set of students.

# THE DANISH CONTEXT



In Denmark, the student population is less diverse in terms of race and colour compared to the United States. However, there are socio-economic factors that influence students' academic performance in primary, secondary and high school.

To address this issue, many Danish higher education institutions are focusing on creating a more inclusive environment for students and staff from all backgrounds. For example, the University of Copenhagen has established a 'Diversity and Inclusion Committee', while Roskilde University has had conversations about diversity, inclusion, and equity in the curriculum. Copenhagen Business School and the Technical University of Denmark (DTU) have also established diversity and inclusion councils to promote gender balance and attract and retain talents from diverse backgrounds. DTU is not only making efforts to promote gender equality, as diversity, equality and inclusion is about more than gender, equality and nationality. Thus, they have chosen to launch a programme that encompasses 'diversity, equality and inclusion'.<sup>52</sup>

While there are certainly areas for improvement regarding diversity in Denmark, it is important to recognise that progress is being made and that there are opportunities to learn from other countries, such as the US, regarding best practices. Through our collaborative efforts and the exchange of ideas, we can further advance our progress towards cultivating a society that is both inclusive and diverse.

# FUTURE WELL-BEING



Photo: FatCamera for iStock

To enforce health promoting student well-being, it is important to act both on an individual and institutional level. The individual level may be restricted, as this action sometimes depends on the actions of the institution or in the framework of the institution. To sustainably become or further improve health-promoting tools at higher education, it is important to be aware of three recurring themes: (1) belonging, (2) transferability and (3) resilience.

Throughout all chapters and cases, the theme of **belonging** was prevalent in various dimensions, physically and psychologically. Research on higher education shows that when students feel supported to develop their sense of belonging and institutions provide a supportive context to flourish, it strengthens the student's sense of self and improves their mental health and motivation. When student well-being is prospering, it increases the students' competencies within innovation, motivation, engagement, and overall performance. Throughout this report, we have seen how belonging can be considered by redesigning classrooms, building safe communities, introducing mindset interventions, and throughout positive psychology via happiness courses. A sense of belonging and coherence is important throughout one's college life and prepares one for life after being a student, as a colleague.

Transferability is, therefore, also a theme, as the cases all prepare the students to be given tools to transfer their competencies throughout their lives in different capacities. Transferability is especially prevalent during **transitions**. These transitions do not only occur intellectually but also due to new organisational or social settings. As the chapter on successful transitioning mentioned, transitions constitute a critical factor in student well-being, as these can psychologically be perceived and experienced as tumultuous times. Whether transitioning from high school to a higher education level teaching, from bachelor's level to graduate level, or from graduating into the job market, transitions can be challenging in many ways, especially adapting and decoding new norms and cultures. Challenging transitions can also lead to feelings of insecurity regarding own competencies, expectations, and belonging, which is why it is important to be aware and offer supportive measures in this regard. This also invites students, educators, and institutions to accommodate different settings and contexts, from physical spaces to supporting systems in transitions and changes in the curriculum.

Another important aspect in ensuring student well-being and health-promoting initiatives is the concept of repetitiveness. In the case of **positive psychology**, it is stated by prominent researchers in the field that happiness courses are not a quick fix but rather an approach that needs repetition in various forms. The key to an effective course on happiness is in the repetition of the course material and maintaining good habits. Studies show that when these courses and toolsets are repeated, they positively reduce stress and increase overall happiness.

Repetition is also a key regarding 'wise' **interventions** or mindset interventions, which will continuously remind students that they are not alone in their challenges, sense of themselves, and feelings of being inadequate. For faculty members, there are also elements to be aware of when teaching to ensure students feel belonging. Faculty members must be aware to reflect upon the belief system they interact with, especially in structures with prevailing norms. This can, for instance, be in situations with events, in communication, when assigning roles in groups or the physical spaces of the lecture area.

The available tools and resources provide different ways for students and institutions hosting them to improve their resilience. These tools can be customized to address specific needs and situations. Resilience can appear in various forms. For instance, when referred to self-efficacy in some sections, this is also a genre in resilience. When working with the course on happiness, 'wise' interventions, positive psychology, and in high regard 'pluralistic ignorance', the common denominator is resilience and promoting tools to become and develop a resilient mindset. The resilience is a competence that can be transferred and applied when experiencing changes, transitions, or obstacles, whether in a higher education setting or other parts of everyday life, independent of which phase or place in one's life.

Learnings from American universities can hopefully contribute to meaningful deliberations within a Danish context in order to further the health-promoting initiatives on student well-being and designing a happier student life for better learning.



# SOURCES

- 1 [At være én, men én iblandt](#)
- 2 [Student Counseling Service](#)
- 3 [Mental Health](#)
- 4 [How universities can support student mental health and wellbeing](#)
- 5 [Stanford d.shcool](#)
- 6 [Learn the science of well-being](#)
- 7 [The Science of Happiness](#)
- 8 [Expanding the Science and Practice of Gratitude](#)
- 9 [Time, Money, and Subjective Well-Being](#)
- 10 [Carol Dweck Revisits the 'Growth Mindset'](#)
- 11 [The Benefits of Frequent Positive Affect: Does Happiness Lead to Success?](#)
- 12 [Teaming x Design](#)
- 13 [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion 4.0](#)
- 14 [Page, Scott. The difference: How the power of diversity creates better groups, firms, schools, and societies. Princeton University Press, 2008.](#)
- 15 [Psychology of Space: How Interiors Impact our Behavior](#)
- 16 [Stanford classrooms: one size does not fit all](#)
- 17 [Active Learning](#)
- 18 [Classroom Design for Active Learning featuring Helen Y. Chu](#)
- 19 [Schools are rethinking classroom design to encourage collaboration, creativity](#)
- 20 [226 suggestions to active learning techniques](#)
- 21 [DTU Campus environment](#)
- 22 [Overview of Mental Health Services for College Students](#)
- 23 [First cross-national results from the WHO World Mental Health International College Student Initiative](#)
- 24 [The real campus mental-health crisis and new models for well-being](#)
- 25 [College to Career: Supporting Mental Health](#)
- 26 [College-to-Workplace Transitions: Becoming a Freshman Again](#)
- 27 [Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education](#)
- 28 [College to Career: Supporting Mental Health](#)
- 29 [30 Colleges That Have Strong Links To America's Prospering Industries](#)
- 30 [College to career: Supporting Mental Health](#)
- 31 [What happens when colleges fail to prepare graduates for jobs?](#)
- 32 [Cooperative Education](#)
- 33 [UC Berkeley - Cleantech to market](#)
- 34 [Teaching a lay theory before college narrows achievement gaps at scale](#)
- 35 [A Brief Social-Belonging Intervention Improves Academic and Health Outcomes of Minority Students](#)
- 36 [Encouraging a Sense of Belonging \(3:40-4:08\)](#)
- 37 [Teaching a lay theory before college narrows achievement gaps at scale](#)
- 38 [Social-Psychological Interventions in Education: They're Not Magic](#)
- 39 [A Brief Social-Belonging Intervention Improves Academic and Health Outcomes of Minority Students](#)
- 40 [Når det perfekte tynger](#)
- 41 [Institutional check-up](#)
- 42 [A Brief Social-Belonging Intervention Improves Academic and Health Outcomes of Minority Students](#)
- 43 [Geoffrey Cohen on Belonging: The Science of Creating Connection and Bridging Divides](#)
- 44 [The Stanford Resilience Project](#)
- 45 [Addressing achievement gaps with psychological interventions](#)
- 46 [A question of belonging: Race, social fit, and achievement.](#)
- 47 [Harvard community building](#)
- 48 [Gender Inclusive Mapping for Harvard University](#)
- 49 [Harvard's Inclusion Index](#)
- 50 [Wise interventions: Psychological remedies for social and personal problems](#)
- 51 [Recursive Processes in Self-Affirmation: Intervening to Close the Minority Achievement Gap](#)
- 52 [Diversitet, lighed og inklusion](#)

**INNOVATION  
CENTRE  
DENMARK**