



Comprehensive Student Wellness Centers at Large Public Universities



Student Affairs Forum

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Profiled wellness centers offer both physical and mental health services. Wellness center administrators collaborate with other campus units (e.g., recreation center, disability services, counseling center) to provide services. To minimize redundant services, administrators appoint dedicated staff liaisons between partner campus units to coordinate joint offerings. The most common offerings include nutrition and fitness education, and counseling services related to:

- Alcohol and other drugs
- Stress management
- Relationship violence
- Sexual assault
- Sexual health

Administrators dedicate wellness center space within the recreation center so both units can share fitness facilities. The wellness center's proximity to a popular recreation center also increases student use of wellness services. Contacts note the removal of the wellness center from the health services building helps to brand the wellness center as a 'healthy space' in contrast to a 'sick space' like health services.

Wellness center directors employ graduate assistants, organize peer health advisor groups, and share staff with other campus units to reduce costs. Graduate assistants offer one-on-one counseling sessions with students in areas such as nutrition and addiction. Wellness centers organize 'peer health advisor' groups so undergraduates can participate in health promotion efforts and help plan wellness events. Wellness center administrators also share staff specialists with other campus units (e.g., a health services' nutritionist teaches in the wellness center space) to minimize staff costs.

Administrators fund wellness center services through student fees and department-generated income. Student fees are included in student tuition, and allow wellness center staff to provide most services free of charge (e.g., nutrition and LGBT counseling). However, wellness centers charge students, faculty, and staff \$20 to \$30 per visit for specialized services (e.g., massage).

Administrators conduct campus-wide student surveys and program-specific evaluations to assess wellness center services. Contacts base campus-wide student surveys on the National College Health Assessment, a national survey of university health behaviors that administrators use to track student health over time. Wellness center staff also host student focus groups and intercept polling after the completion of wellness center programs to evaluate program visibility and student satisfaction.

2) Wellness Center Facilities and Staff

Facilities

Share Facilities with Campus Recreation to Consolidate Resources

Four contact institutions maintain wellness center space within the recreation center and one has plans to adopt this model when the university secures funding. During the construction of a new recreation center, administrators at the **University of Minnesota** branded the entire building as a recreation and wellness space. The decision to include the wellness center in the recreation center allows wellness center staff to incorporate fitness facilities into service offerings. The proximity to recreation center programs also increases students' access to and awareness of wellness programming.

Wellness Center Locations

Institution	Maintains Wellness Center Space Within:		
	Recreation Center	Health Services	Student Union
Purdue University	✓	✓	
University at Buffalo		✓	✓
University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign	✓		
University of Iowa	✓		
University of Minnesota	✓		
University of Washington-Seattle			✓

The health services building at **Purdue University** houses the main office of their wellness center. However, wellness center administrators note far greater attendance at their satellite office in the recreation center.

Include Office Space, Walk-In Area, and Multi-Purpose Rooms in the Wellness Center to Provide a Wide Variety of Services

Profiled wellness centers include a front desk and waiting area for students, as well as office space. Profiled centers contain five to seven offices: one office for each staff specialist (e.g., alcohol and other drugs counselor) for use in student consultations, and one office for the director. Many wellness centers also include multipurpose space for group meetings and classes, a room for massage therapy, and a demonstration kitchen for use in nutrition classes.

Employ Graduate Assistants and Split Staff Specialist Time Between Campus Units

Graduate students in the schools of public health, social work, and psychology often supplement wellness center staff. Wellness center administrators occasionally use state grants for specific programs (e.g., sexual violence prevention) to fund graduate assistant salaries. To minimize staff costs, wellness center administrators often share staff specialists with health services (e.g., nutrition and massage specialists who provide office hours in both locations).

Allow Peer Health Advisors to Assist Health Promotion Efforts

Wellness center administrators develop peer health advisor groups to increase undergraduate student involvement in the wellness center and increase the wellness center's health promotion efforts. Peer health advisors apply for membership through an essay and interview process. At the **University of Washington – Seattle**, peer health advisors receive training from wellness center specialists in the Bacchus core competencies (i.e., wellness competencies defined by the university-focused health organization the Bacchus Network) and have the option to receive credit. Wellness center staff train students for two hours per week for one semester. Peer health advisors work with student government and other student groups to organize campus events (e.g., AIDS awareness day) and health-related presentations.

Undergraduate Wellness Center Employees

Undergraduate work-study students hired to staff the front desk of the wellness center may require additional training in privacy due to HIPAA regulations.



The University of Iowa's 'Health Ninjas' Program

The wellness center at the **University of Iowa** hosts a program called 'Health Ninjas' that trains students to include health facts and dispel health myths during everyday conversations.

Wellness Center Directors Should Report to One Senior Administrator that Can Offer Consistent Oversight

The collaborative nature of wellness centers leads some administrators to create a dual reporting structure for the wellness center director. At the **University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign**, the wellness center director reports to human resources for their work with staff and campus recreation for their work with students. Contacts note this structure can prevent the development of a clear, unified wellness center mission because directors occasionally receive conflicting guidance.

3) Wellness Center Services

Services Provided

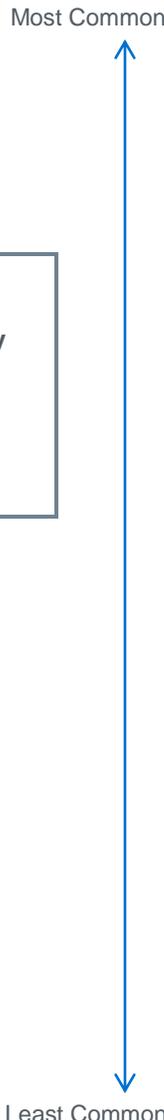
Offer a Variety of Physical and Mental Health Services to Maximize Student Use

The location of the wellness center closely relates to the type of services offered. Institutions with wellness center space in the recreation center offer more physical wellness services while institutions with wellness center space outside of the recreation center offer more mental health services.

Contact Institutions' Wellness Center Offerings

Offerings:	WC Within Recreation Center				WC Outside Recreation Center	
	Illinois	Minnesota	Iowa	Purdue	Buffalo	Washington
Nutrition	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Alcohol and Other Drugs*	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Fitness (e.g., yoga)	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Stress Management (e.g., massage)		✓	✓		✓	✓
Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence			✓	✓	✓	✓
Sexual Health			✓	✓		
LGBT Counseling					✓	
Suicide Intervention						✓

Purdue University has two wellness center locations.



*Includes tobacco cessation.

Create Dedicated Groups to Oversee Programmatic Collaboration Between Campus Units

Strategic collaboration between staff in the wellness center and other campus units minimizes redundant services. Wellness center directors at most contact institutions have monthly meetings with their partner unit directors (e.g., recreation and health services) to coordinate programming.



Wellness Collaborative at the *University of Minnesota*

Administrators at the **University of Minnesota** organize a 'wellness collaborative' with members from a 26 campus units ranging from Health Journalism to the Center for Spirituality and Healing. The group meets monthly and provides an opportunity for all applicable campus units to share health-related information.

Partner with Academic Departments and Other Campus Units to Expand Wellness Center Audience

Wellness center staff provide academic offerings as well as extracurricular services to reach a greater segment of the student population. Administrators also partner with campus units such as recreation, health services, and residential life to provide non-academic services.

Sample Wellness Center Programs:

- Two contact institutions have a program called **'Don't Cancel that Class!'** in which a wellness center staff member presents on a current student health topic as a substitute for an absent faculty member.
- Wellness center administrators at the **University of Minnesota** **rent the recreation and wellness center cycling room to faculty** to use as a classroom so students can exercise during lecture.
- The wellness center at the **University at Buffalo** offers a **health and wellness minor** taught by wellness center faculty, with a curriculum designed by the wellness center director.
- Wellness center administrators at the **University at Buffalo** offer **handicapped accessible yoga classes** in coordination with disability services.
- At the request of residential life, wellness center staff at **Purdue University** develop anti-marijuana **materials for residential advisors**.
- At multiple contact institutions, the health services' nutritionist teaches **healthy cooking classes** in the wellness center's demonstration kitchen.

Hours of Operation

Wellness center staff allow demand for services to inform hours of operation. The **University of Iowa's** wellness center initially remained open until 1:00 a.m. but administrators found there was not enough demand to stay open after midnight.

Promotion of Services

Promote Wellness Center Events and Services with Poster Campaigns, Online Outreach, and Monthly Publications

Student awareness of service offerings, programs, and events is integral to a wellness center's success. Wellness center staff use online outreach (e.g., email blasts, Facebook posts), poster campaigns, and orientation week seminars (e.g., anti-stress workshops) to increase student awareness of services. Wellness center staff at the **University of Washington–Seattle** publish a magazine once a semester to increase faculty and staff awareness of resources.

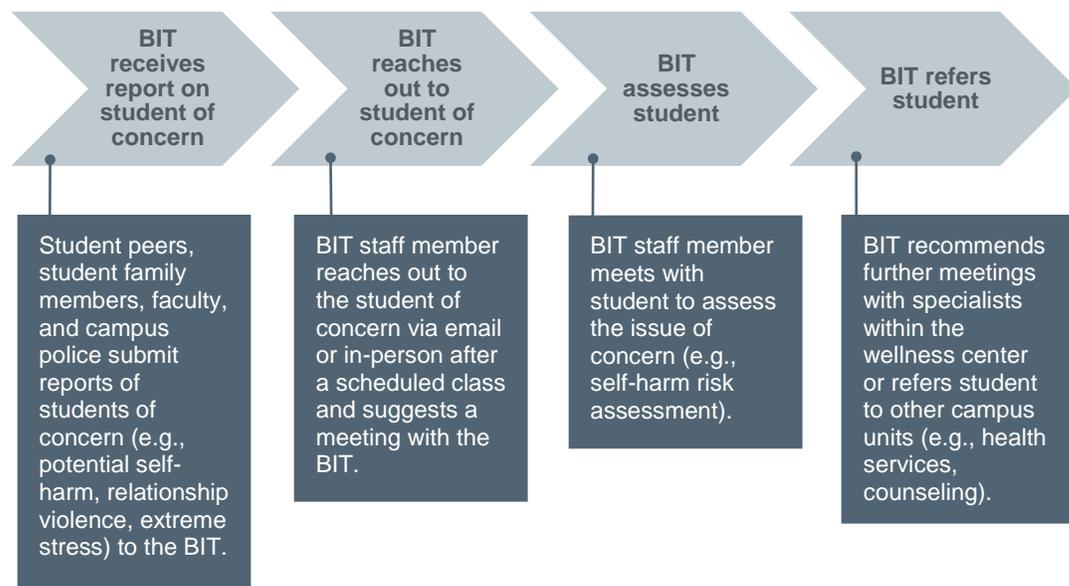
Involve Students Through Online Interactive Wellness Programs

Contacts report online interactive wellness programs greatly increase the number of students wellness centers reach. Students can log activity, sleep, and daily nutrition, as well as receive information on wellness center programming. Contacts note students respond to incentives (e.g., apparel, fitness equipment, plane tickets) for the completion of the online programs' fitness and nutrition challenges.

Wellness Centers are Uniquely Positioned to Provide Targeted, Preventative Outreach

Some contact wellness centers target outreach to students of concern to intervene before crises occur and health services are required. The wellness center at the **University of Washington–Seattle** manages a behavioral intervention team (BIT), which assesses students of concern and refers them to the appropriate campus unit.

Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) Process



Healthy U

\$12,500

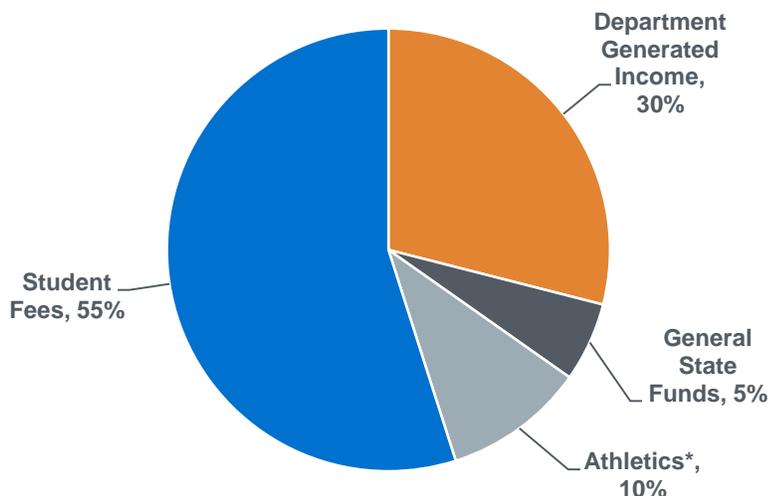
Wellness center staff at the **University of Minnesota** purchased an online social media fitness platform including a mobile application called 'Healthy U' from Total Health Interactive for \$12,500. In a period of two months the program had been used by over 10 percent of students.

Cost of Services

Include Wellness Center Costs in Student Fees and Charge per Visit for Specialized Services

Student fees represent the majority of wellness center funding. The next largest source of income for the wellness center is department-generated income. Wellness center administrators do not charge for meetings with wellness center counselors (e.g., nutrition consultation, health assessment), but charge per visit for specialized services (e.g., massage, fitness classes). The wellness center also receives state appropriations, which often include grants for particular programs (e.g., sexual violence prevention).

University of Minnesota Recreation and Wellness Center Budget¹



Approximate Total Annual Budget: \$15,000,000

* Profiled institution shares swimming pool with athletics department.

Student Fees

\$125-235

Student fees allocated to the wellness center range from \$125 to \$235 per student per year.

Cost per Visit

\$20-30

The price of specialized services ranges from \$20 to \$30 per visit.

Offer Memberships to Faculty and Community Members to Maximize Revenue

Half of profiled wellness centers offer services to faculty and/or community members. At the **University of Iowa**, the annual fee for faculty and community members is \$100 more than the student fee. Wellness center administrators often partner with human resources staff to provide specific employee wellness offerings (e.g., incentive programs).



Employee Wellness Incentive Program at the University of Minnesota

For \$199, wellness center staff offer faculty and staff fitness classes (e.g., cardio, strength training) twice a week for eight weeks. If the faculty or staff member attends at least 14 of 16 classes, they are fully reimbursed.

1) Provided by research contact.

4) Wellness Program Development and Assessment

Program Development

Include Representatives from Both Recreation and Health Services in a Dedicated Wellness Center Development Committee

At the **University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign**, administrators convened a group of representatives from health services, recreation, student affairs, the counseling center, human resources, and insurance to develop a job description for a wellness center director. At the **University of Minnesota**, the wellness center director and her staff jointly developed the wellness center's mission. The mission distinguishes the wellness center from recreation and health services, and guides their choice of service offerings.

Distinguish Wellness Center Brand from Health Services to Increase Student Use

Contacts note the importance of a brand distinct from health services and counseling so students and faculty can understand the division of services.



Health Services as a 'Sick Space'

- Addresses clinical or urgent cases
- Discourages students from reaching out for preventative care
- Stigmatizes students who access services as those in need of help



Wellness Services as a 'Healthy Space'

- Encourages students who do not believe they are in need of clinical help to feel comfortable accessing services
- Increases administrators' ability to address sensitive topics like mental health, relationship violence, and weight

Conduct Annual Campus-Wide Health Assessments and Program Specific Evaluations

Administrators commonly supplement the National College Health Assessment with questions of particular interest to the university when they create annual wellness surveys. Wellness center administrators also conduct separate online surveys of campus alcohol use. Contacts conduct focus groups and intercept polling to evaluate specific programs.

1

Campus-Wide Student Survey

Wellness center administrators conduct surveys online. Wellness center staff use the survey's data to inform service offerings, plan events for the year, and track the success of longitudinal efforts.

2

Focus Groups

Administrators at **Purdue University** host two focus groups per program and include five to ten students in each. Administrators note the importance of training an undergraduate or graduate student to lead focus groups, rather than a wellness center staff member, to encourage honest respondent answers.

3

Intercept Polling

Wellness center administrators at **Purdue University** ask student interns to conduct intercept polling (e.g., a student surveys other students on the quad) a few months after focus groups to assess awareness of wellness center programming.

Wellness Center Administrators Struggle to Quantify Outcomes

Contacts note increased pressure from senior administrators to produce quantifiable measurements of wellness center outcomes. Contacts struggle to produce quantitative data beyond program attendance, financial metrics, and imprecise student evaluation surveys.



Does Wellness Center Use Correlate with Student Success?

Recreation and wellness center staff at the **University of Iowa** plan to conduct a study to demonstrate the value of recreation and wellness centers on campus. Administrators will recreate a study originally administered by the National Intramural Recreational Sports Association that identified a correlation between recreation and wellness center attendance and student success.

5) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- Do institutions maintain a dedicated wellness center space or coordinate wellness programming between campus units?
- How many staff members does the wellness center employ?
- What is the internal reporting structure of wellness center staff?
- Who provides funding for the wellness center?
- How much do students pay for wellness center services?
- Where is the wellness center located?
- What are the wellness center's hours of operation?
- What services does the student wellness center offer?
- How do wellness center staff collaborate with other campus units (e.g., health services, recreation centers) to offer coordinated programming?
- How do administrators incorporate technology into wellness center programming?
- How do administrators incorporate academic components into programming?
- How do wellness center staff market wellness center services to students?
- To what extent do faculty and staff have access to wellness center services?
- What is the mission of the student wellness center?
- What metrics do administrators use to evaluate wellness center programs?
- What assessment metrics do administrators find most effective?
- What student outcomes have emerged from program evaluation?
- What changes to current wellness programming do administrators desire or anticipate in the near future?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB's internal and online research libraries (<http://www.eab.com>)
- The Chronicle of Higher Education (<http://chronicle.com>)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)
- Institution Websites:
 - Purdue University Student Wellness Office. Accessed March 18, 2014. <http://www.purdue.edu/swo/aboutswo/index.shtml>
 - University at Buffalo Wellness Education Services. Accessed March 18, 2014. <http://www.student-affairs.buffalo.edu/shs/wes/>
 - University of Illinois Wellness Center. Accessed March 18, 2014. <http://www.campusrec.illinois.edu/wellnesscenter/>
 - University of Iowa Wellness Services. Accessed March 18, 2014. <https://recserv.uiowa.edu/Apps/Wellness/>
 - University of Minnesota University Recreation and Wellness. Accessed March 18, 2014. <http://recwell.umn.edu/>
 - University of Washington Health and Wellness. Accessed March 18, 2014. <http://depts.washington.edu/livewell/>

The Forum interviewed wellness center directors at large public universities.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Institutional Enrollment (Undergraduate/Total)	Classification
Purdue University	Midwest	31,000 / 40,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University at Buffalo	Northeast	19,500 / 29,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign	Midwest	32,300 / 44,500	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University of Iowa	Midwest	22,000 / 30,100	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University of Minnesota	Midwest	34,500 / 51,900	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University of Washington – Seattle	Pacific West	29,500 / 43,500	Research Universities (very high research activity)

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

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