

Building effective wellbeing programs through evidence evaluation

NASPA Strategies 2019

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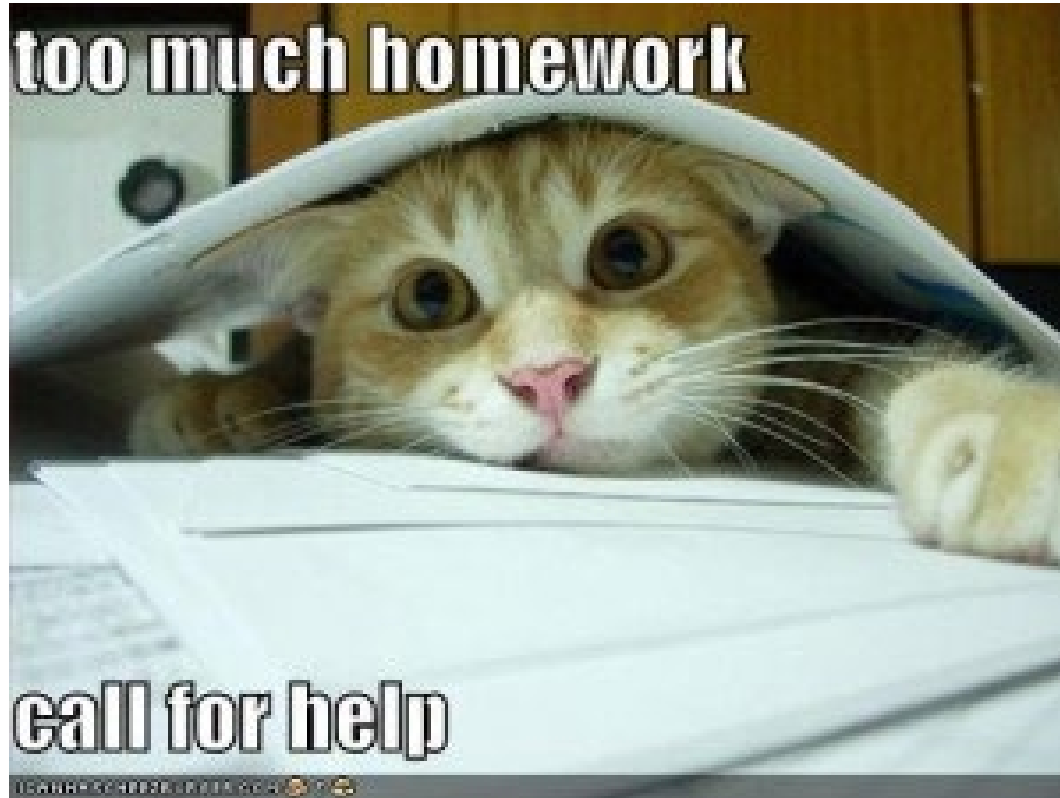
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Washington, DC



- Nicole: Director, Wellbeing Assessment
 - One of the Wellbeing Collaborative projects
 - Specialties: Applied psychometrics
- Malika: Director, Office of Wellbeing
 - Facilitates the Thrive Initiative
 - Specialties: Program development, implementation, evaluation

1. Defining evidence-informed programming
2. Operationalizing your constructs
3. Evaluating context
 - Evidence evaluation model 1: Internal evidence
4. Selecting targets – developing activities
 - Evidence evaluation model 2: External evidence
5. Applying the models to programs
6. Implementation feasibility on your campus



- Let's get our materials!
- Did you bring a belonging program with you? (not required)

- Designed to decrease first-year students' sense of social anxiety through emails from upperclassmen
- Designed by Cherise James, our Associate Director of Orientation & Lower Division Programming

- From the "Early Decision" web page regarding "Letters So Dear"
 - “Letters So Dear” is a weekly email with advice for our newest Demon Deacons; it contains letters from older students, who share tips about succeeding in and out of the classroom, adjusting to college life, and more. They hope you can learn from their experiences as you transition to life at Wake Forest.
- [Sample letter](#)



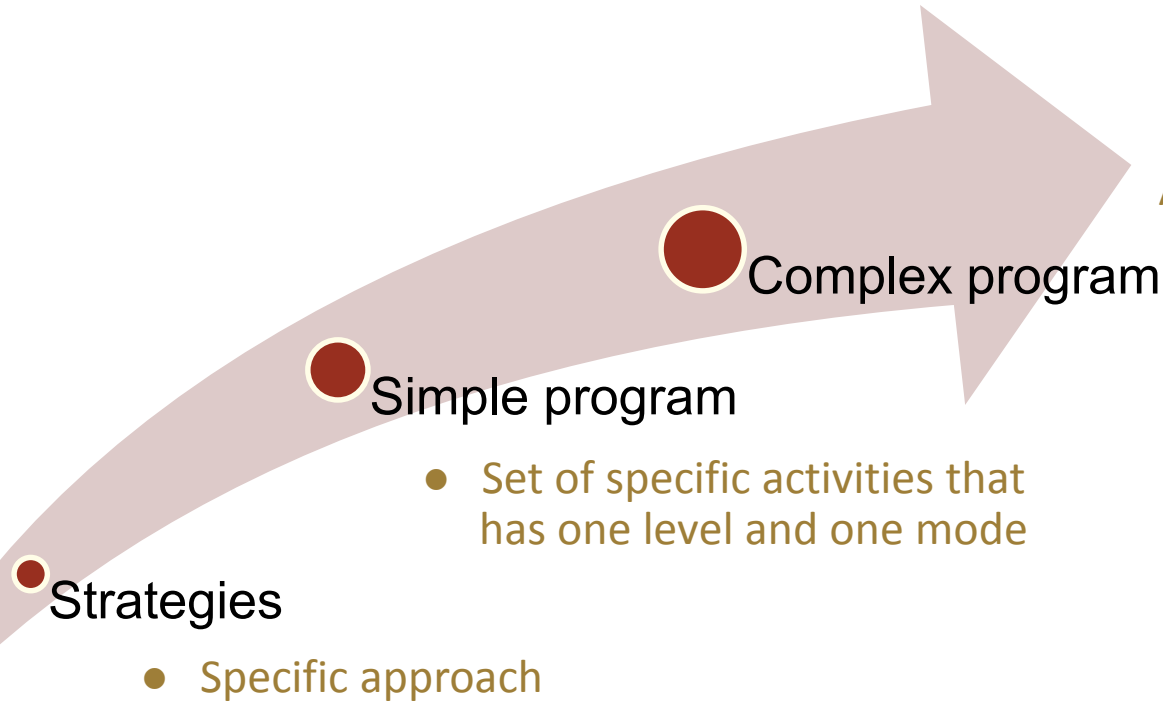
1. Evidence-informed Programming

- What is evidence-informed programming in the context of wellbeing in higher education settings?
- How do you use your available evidence to engage in evidence-informed programming?
- It's harder, so why do we bother?

- Evidence-based practice
- Evidence-based programs
- Evidence-based programming
- Evidence-informed programming
- Empirically supported treatments
- Others?

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- Evidence-based programs
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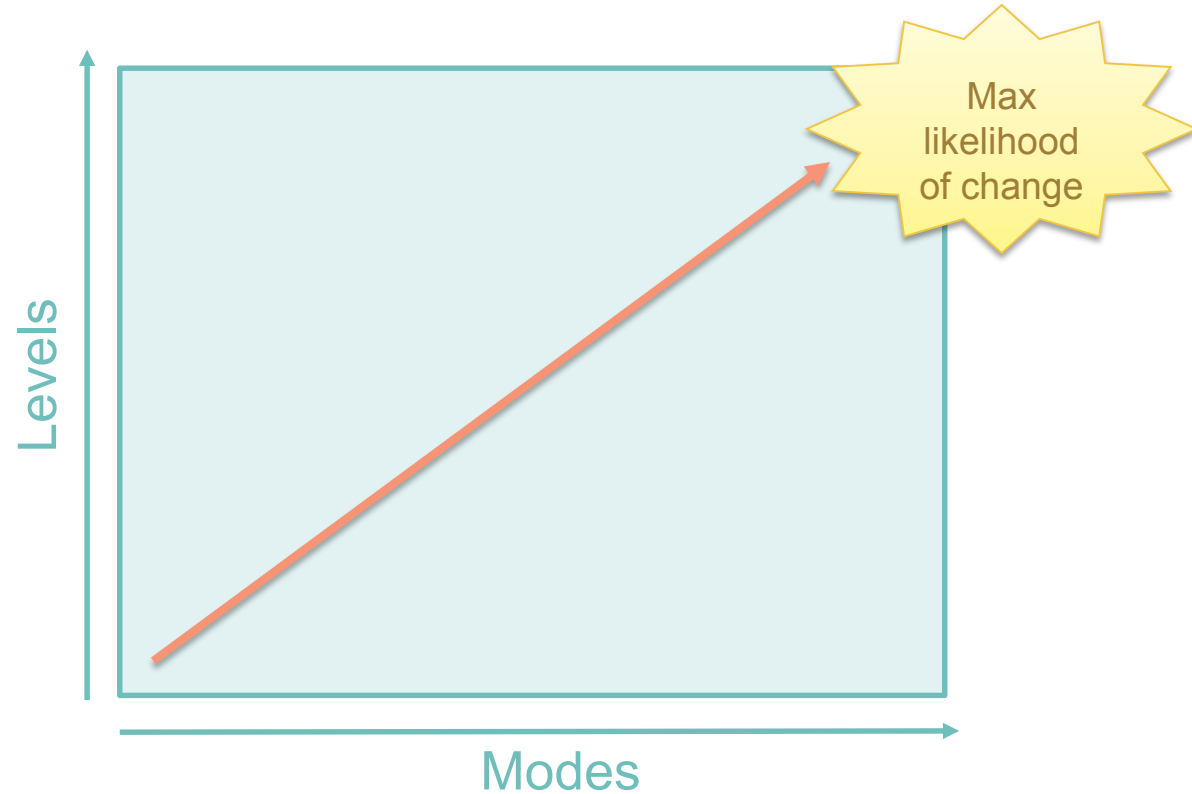
What is a program?



A set of specific activities that spans multiple modes and/or levels, used to achieve desired outcomes for complex constructs such as wellbeing



Various strategies/modes at multiple levels, used to achieve desired outcomes for complex constructs such as wellbeing



Have:

- Been effective through multiple, rigorous studies
- Been effective in large studies with diverse populations
- Been replicated repeatedly and well
- Demonstrated significant & sustained results

Are not:

- Based on one study
- Based on several weak studies
- Only effective in small populations (unless that limitation is specified)
- Only able to produce small or short-term effects

<http://www.episcenter.psu.edu/ebp/definition>



In the absence of
evidence-based programs
that can be implemented in the
framework of
evidence-based practice,
we can engage the strategies of
evidence-informed programming

Steps 1-2: Model & operationalize

Theoretical
Foundations

Internal
Evidence

External
Evidence

Prior program
effectiveness





2. Model & operationalize your constructs

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Theoretical
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effectiveness



- Start with research-based theory
- Turn into a conceptual model
- Operationalize your constructs:
 - Clearly enough to be measured...
 - ...and to be associated with concrete programming goals

Worksheet 1

1. How does your institution define wellbeing? Do you use a multidimensional model? Is your definition based on an existing model or research?

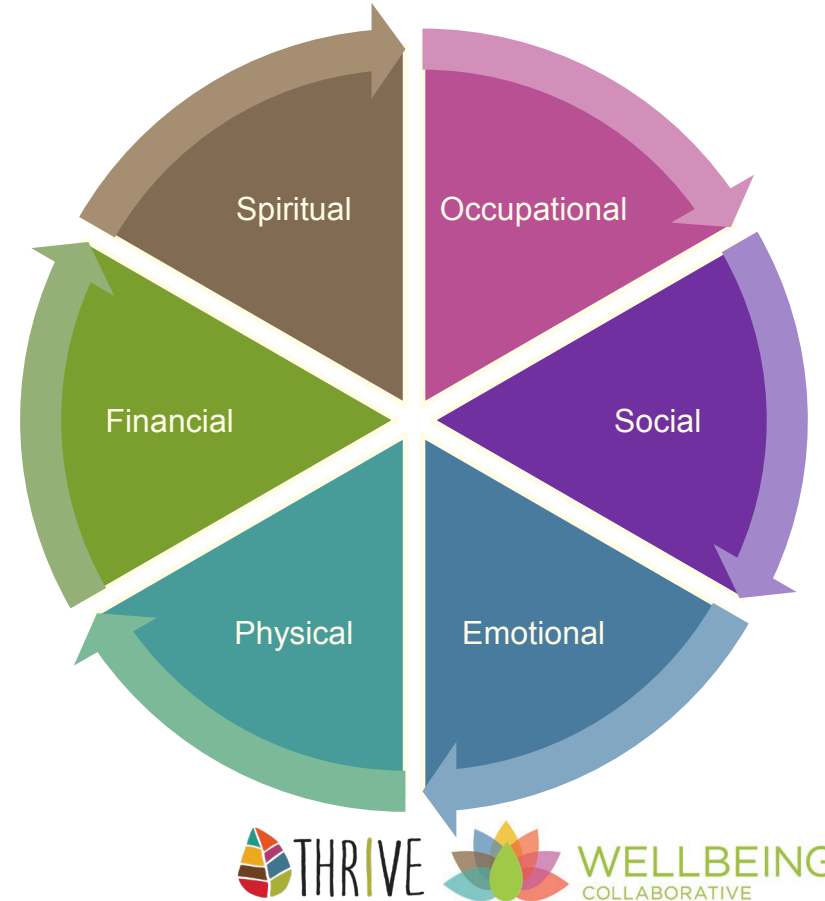


What is wellbeing?

Happiness
Life Satisfaction
Physical & mental health
Meaning & purpose
Self-acceptance/self-esteem
Engagement
Resilience
Autonomy/Locus of Control
Vitality
Personal expressiveness
Authenticity
Intrinsic Motivation.....



- Challenges: Can mistake context (“where” or “how”) for content (the goal or “what”)
 - How to be well at your job vs How to identify and pursue your purpose
 - How to meditate vs How to develop emotional stability



Developmentally relevant
Research-supported
University-supportable



From OSU: Sense of belonging is, at the most basic level, whether or not students feel respected, valued, accepted, cared for, included, and that they matter, in the classroom, at college, or in their chosen career path (Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging is related to college students' cognition, affect, and behaviors (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). In other words, students can think, feel, and act like they belong. For example, a student who thinks (*cognition*) and feels (*affect*) that they belong in class is more likely to show up to class (*behavior*) than a student who does not think and feel that they belong. Sense of belonging is a basic human need and motivation (Strayhorn, 2012). That is, *everyone* needs to belong.

<https://ucat.osu.edu/bookshelf/teaching-topics/shaping-a-positive-learning-environment/sense-of-belonging-in-the-college-classroom/>

Worksheet 1

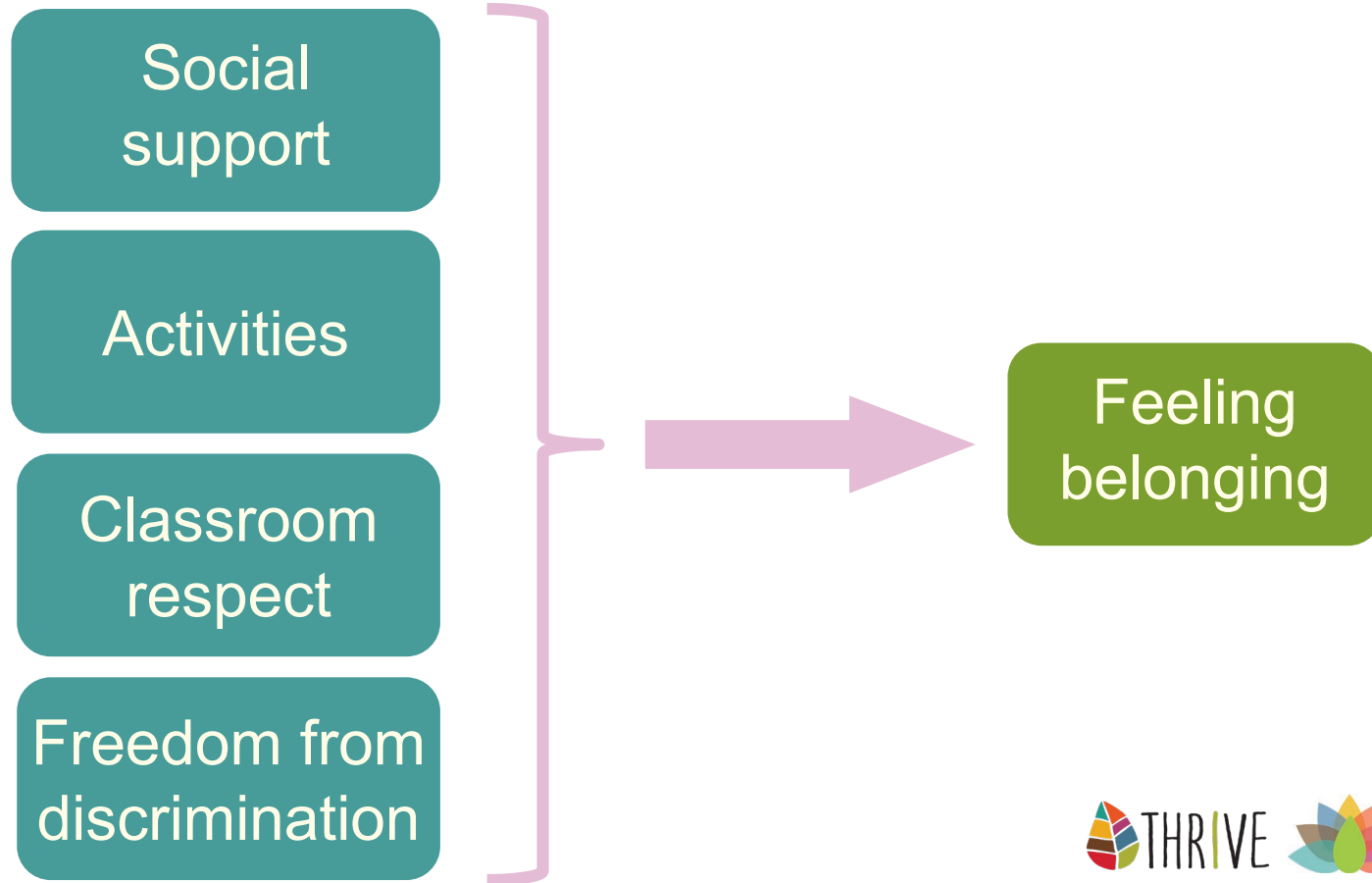
2. What about the belonging definition is important to your institution?
3. What do you want to see change in?

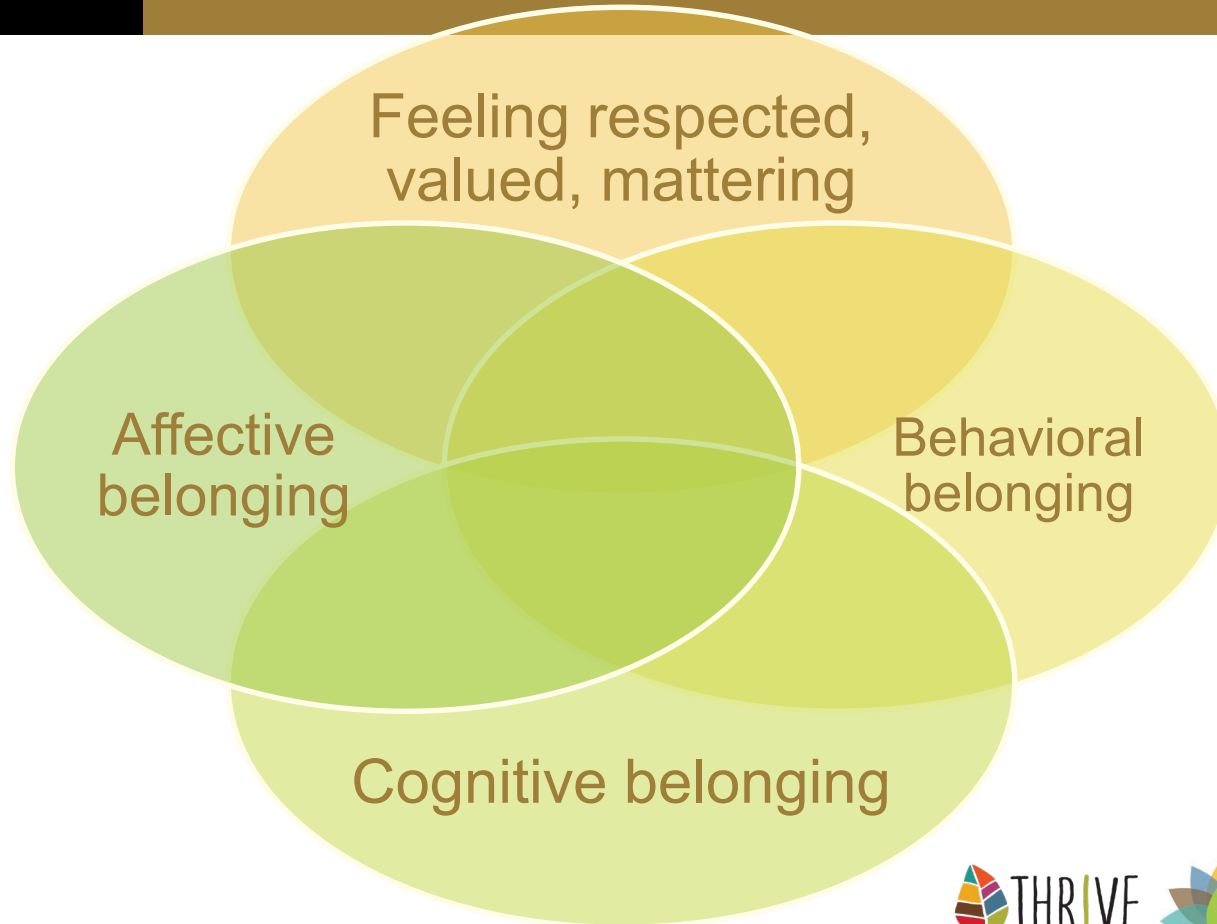
Worksheet 1

Ideally, you would model and operationalize the entire definition. For today, focus on the components that are relevant to your setting (Questions 2 & 3):

4. “Sketch” a belonging model based on the definition we just read.

- Agreeing that you feel like you are welcomed part of the school's community
- **Contributing factors (i.e., “pathways”)**
 - Social support: Friends, faculty/staff
 - Activities that help
 - Feeling respected in the classroom
 - Freedom from discrimination





- From Wikipedia:
 - Operationalization is thus the process of defining a fuzzy concept so as to make it clearly distinguishable, measurable, and understandable in terms of empirical observations.

- The weather
 - How do we typically operationalize it?
 - How: much, often, more; does it: meet a certain criterion, relate to X in a certain way, etc.
- Physical health
- Mental health
- Meaning

5. What components of your model will you operationalize? How exactly?

- **Agreeing that:**
 - I feel a sense of belonging
 - I feel accepted
 - I feel included
- To measure the contributing factors as part of program evaluation, they must also be operationalized



3. Context evaluation & internal evidence

Steps 1-2: Model & operationalize

Theoretical
Foundations

Internal
Evidence

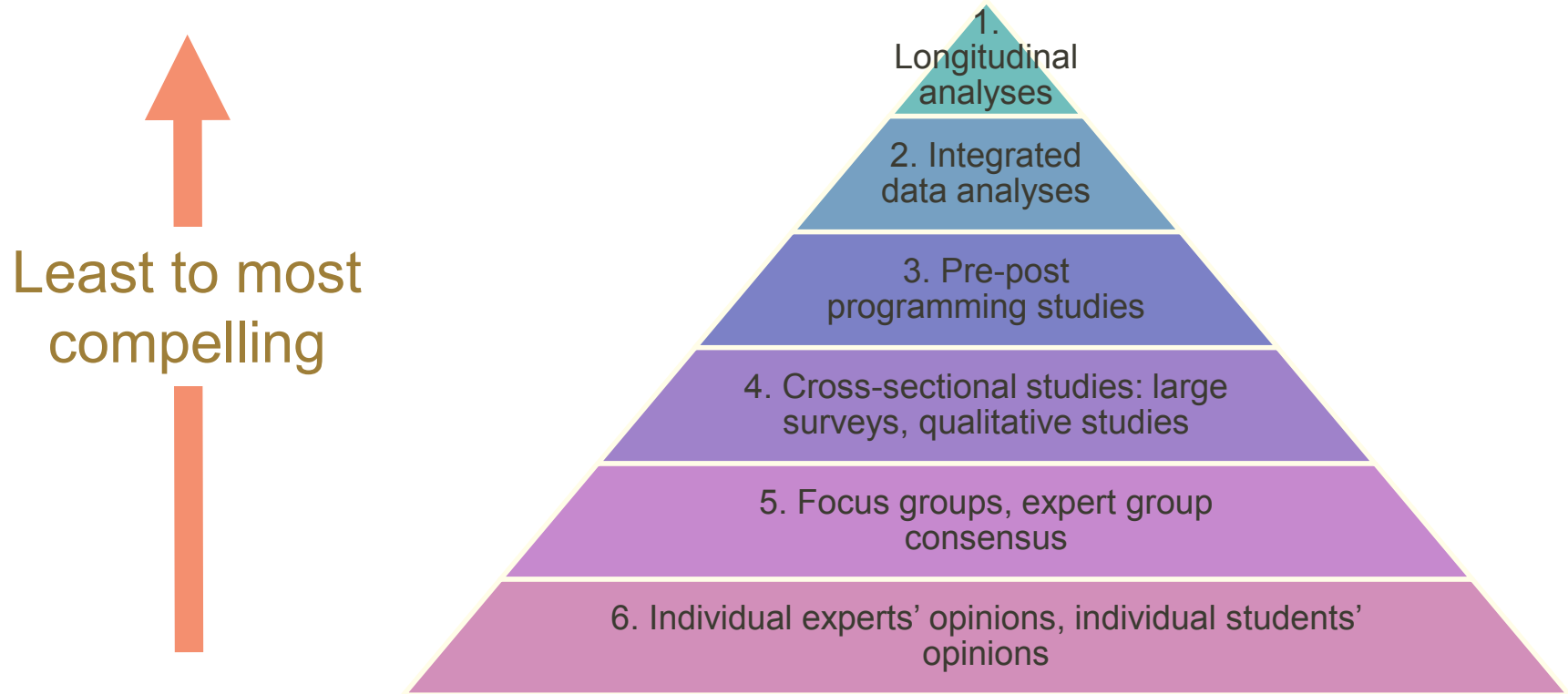
External
Evidence

Prior program
effectiveness



- Context =
 - Where are we?
 - How did we get here?
 - Where do we want to go: needs, interests, and values?
 - What resources do we have to get us there?
- Internal evidence: The evidence generated by & specific to your institution

What is internal evidence?



What is internal evidence?

1. Longitudinal analyses

- Has anyone tracked a cohort over time?

2. Integrated data analyses

- Multiple data sources, e.g., WBA + HERI + focus groups; linked-records data mining

3. Pre-post programming studies

- Program evaluations

4. Cross-sectional studies: large surveys, qualitative studies

- Surveys without longitudinal tracking; other one-time studies; aggregate-level data mining

5. Focus groups, expert group consensus

- Tend not to be as rigorous as cross-sectional studies or qualitative research.

6. Individual experts' opinions, individual students' opinions

- Can provide important context for other evidence. Can also involve inaccurate guesswork; single viewpoint

- Discussions with experts
 - Everyone is expert about something
 - Important to know boundaries of your own and others' expertise
- Expert consensus groups
 - Expert opinions can be tested across each other
 - Stakeholder engagement = more experts

- Discussions with students
 - Students are expert about their own experiences
- Focus groups
 - Easily biased by methods
 - Can provide answers to questions you didn't know you had
- Open responses on large-scale surveys

- Thriving Quotient – quick wellbeing snapshot
- Wake's Wellbeing Assessment
- NCHA – health & substance use
- Healthy Minds – mental health & services use
- CIRP – student characteristics, involvement, diversity
- NIRSA – student recreation engagement
- NSSE – student engagement

- Academic records
- Student engagement records
- Academic materials: essays, test scores
- Student media materials
- Programming efforts records
- Student program feedback
- Faculty/staff wellbeing, records, engagement, etc.

Relevance:
How well
does the
evidence's...

...definition or
model match
yours?

...sample
match yours?

...timeframe
match yours?

...setting match
yours?

Quality:
Is the
evidence...

...biased in any
way?

...inconsistent?

...indirect?

...imprecise?

Worksheet 2

Apply internal evidence evaluation models to evidence.

1. What is the evidence
2. Where is it on pyramid
3. What is the relevance
4. What is the quality

- CIRP Survey, Your First College Year
- Definition (p. 17 of Construct report):
Feeling of academic and social integration
- Convenience sample of first-year students
at end of academic year
- Administered every other year
- Students do it on their own time

- Definition: Felt sense of belonging at school
- Working draft in folder
- Convenience sample of half of all students
- Administered every other year
- Students do it on their own time

- Definition: Leadership Team is worried that international students aren't feeling a sense of belonging and are not participating in activities
- They tell you their opinion comes from counselors, advisers, and other staff working with troubled international students

- The Link is our student engagement platform.
- A data review showed that international students are participating in activities at a lower rate than domestic students.
- You have not connected Link data to survey data.

Worksheet 2

What are some other internal sources of data you could add to your list for evaluation?



4. Programming steps 4-9 & external evidence

Steps 1-2: Model & operationalize

Theoretical
Foundations

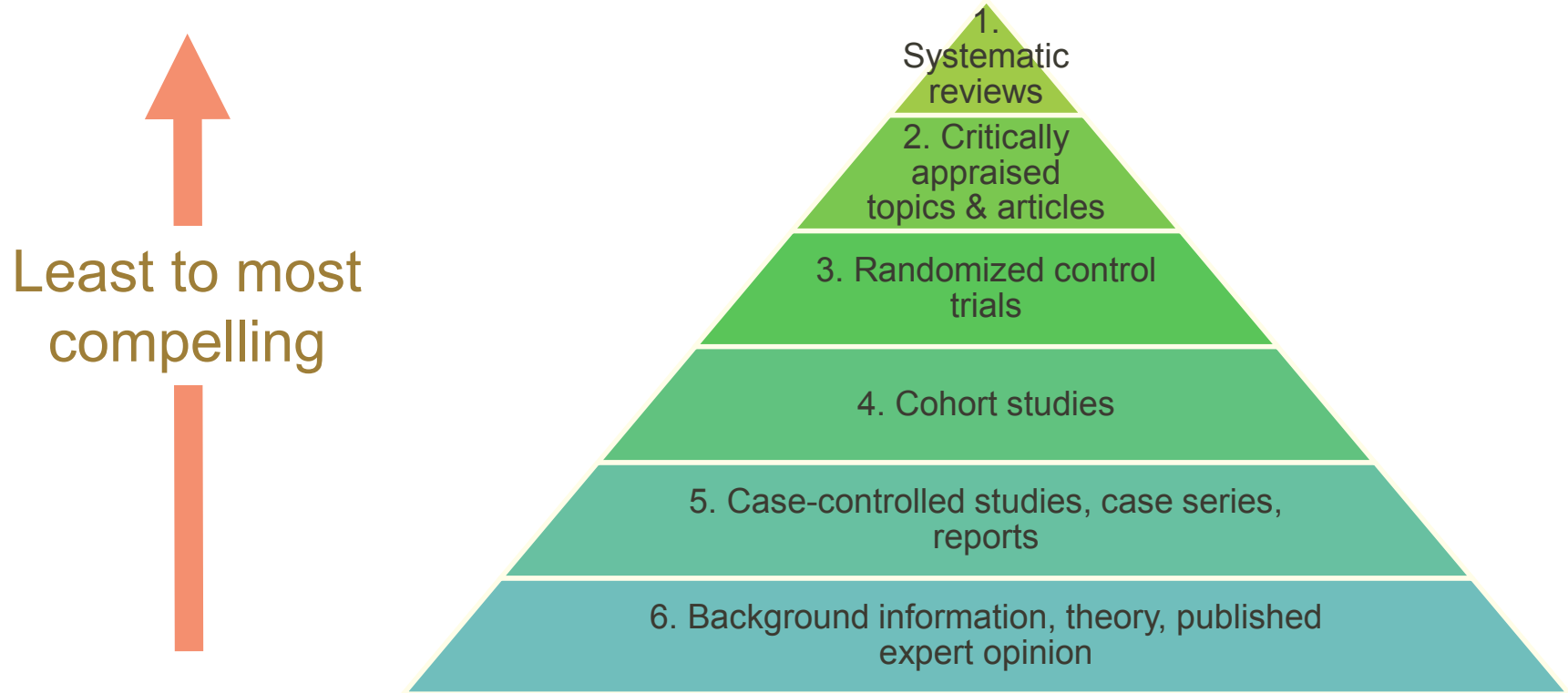
Internal
Evidence

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effectiveness



- What does the literature say about:
 - What to “move”?
 - For whom?
 - How to “move” it?
- What have other settings done successfully?
- External evidence: not generated by or specific to your institution



1. Systematic reviews

- Published research

2. Critically appraised topics & articles

- Published research

3. Randomized control trials

- Has anyone seen an RCT for a campus program?

4. Cohort studies

- Large-scale survey studies, program implementation & evaluation, quasi-experimental designs, other data

5. Case-controlled studies, case series, reports

- Something that has been tried with one or two people or a small group

6. Background information, theory, expert opinion

- Published theory & published expert commentary and opinion

- Decrease first-year students' sense of social anxiety through emails from upperclassmen
- Informed by Walton & Cohen 2011
- Evaluation: Surveyed first-year students and asked: (1) did they like it, (2) did they find it helpful, (3) did they feel like they learned anything (hypothetical)

Worksheet 1

6. What belonging program will you be working with? Ours? One from your institution?

7. How does it define belonging?

- The behavior/state we want the program to change
- Some belonging-relevant examples:
 - **Letters so Dear:** Thoughts about permanence of social anxiety
 - Willingness to try making new friends
 - Culture of endorsing or challenging discriminatory behavior

Goal: Broad statement of what you want to achieve, in light of current resources and other context

Objectives: Specific things you will do to achieve your goal(s)

SMART Objectives

- **S**pecific (simple, sensible, significant)
- **M**easurable (meaningful, motivating)
- **A**chievable (agreed, attainable)
- **R**elevant (reasonable, realistic and resourced, results-based)
- **T**ime bound (time-based, time limited, time/cost limited, timely, time-sensitive)

Socio-ecological Framework

We need a both/and approach!



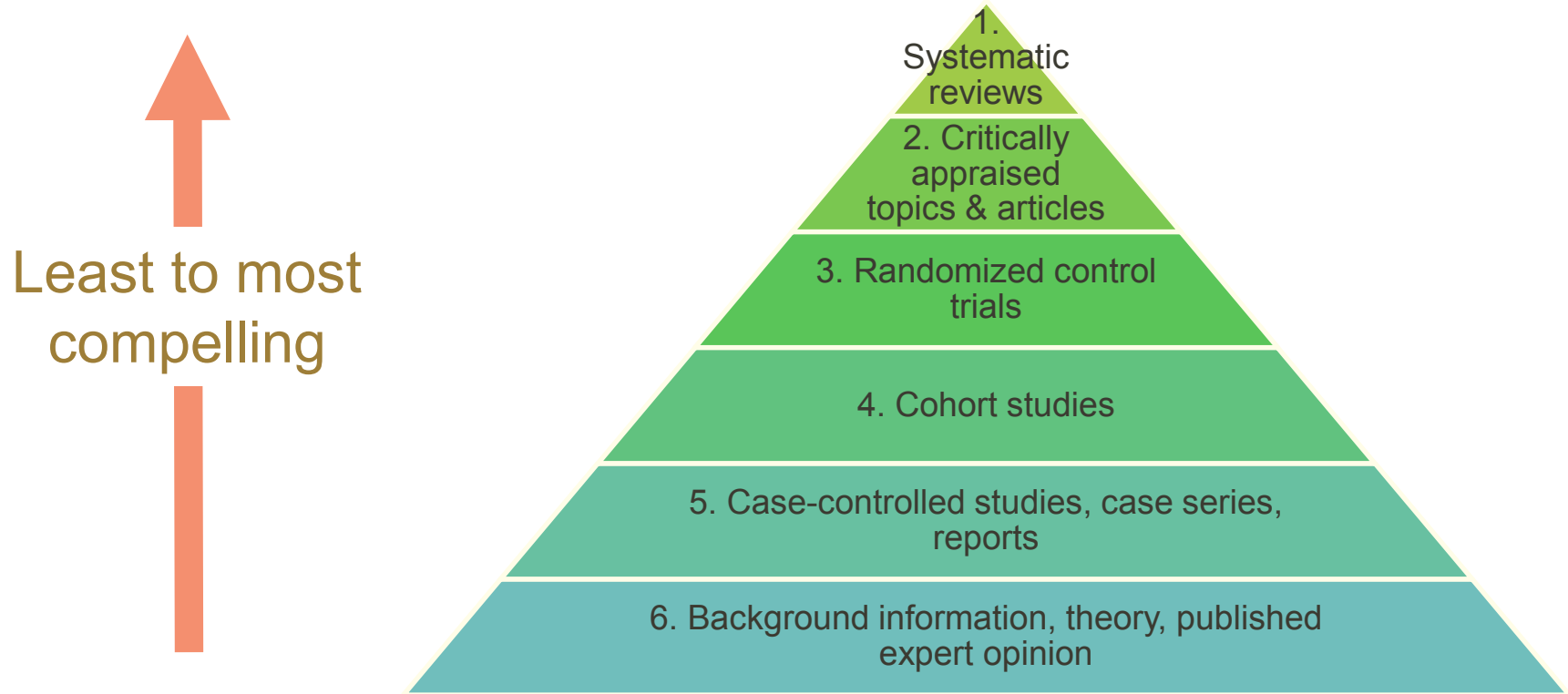
- Who is your program for?
 - Students at risk?
 - All students?
 - All first-year students? Biology majors? Just people using academic advising services? Something else?
 - The more specific you can be, the better.

- Processes: In what way are you changing the target
- Belonging example: Target = Sense of permanence about social anxiety
 - Normalize it?
 - Make it go away?
 - Change the content?
 - Something else?

- Delivery strategies: In general, how you get the process to happen
- Belonging example:
 - Stories from other students
 - Stories from own personal history
 - Direct challenging of cognitions
 - Providing information
 - Feelings-processing

- Activities are the deliverable product
- What exactly are you going to do? Say? Where? When? How?
- What exactly are participants going to do? Say? Where? When? How?
- Consider: culture, staffing, setting

- Changing beliefs about social anxiety permanence by:
 - Normalizing through story-sharing with peers in group discussions facilitated by RAs
 - Changing content by essay-writing during orientation
 - Challenging it by providing information pamphlets during move-in



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- College freshmen (population)
- Sense of social belonging (not quite the target)
- The intervention aimed to lessen psychological perceptions of threat on campus by framing social adversity as common and transient (target & process)
- Subtle attitude-change strategies (strategies)

- Participants read a report of a fake survey of more senior students at their school. The results showed that most respondents initially worried about belonging but grew more confident over time.
- Participants were asked to write an essay describing how their own experiences in college echoed the experiences summarized in the survey. They then turned their essay into a speech, which they delivered to a video camera. These materials, participants were told, would be shown to future students to help ease their transition to college. (Activities)

- Survey of students at research university (population)
- More frequent interactions with diverse peers was positively associated with students' sense of belonging, as well three out of four measures of student satisfaction (process, delivery strategy)

- Peer mentoring and staff care and support had a direct, positive relationship with belonging. (delivery strategy, process, target)
- A specific course and faculty encouragement had a direct, positive relationship with how much they felt that they mattered. (delivery strategy, process, target)
- That last part was not true, however, for students who identified as racial and ethnic minorities. (population)

- Letters So Dear evaluation (hypothetical)
- Surveyed first-year students:
 1. Did they like it? Yes, a lot
 2. Did they find it helpful? Moderately
 3. Did they feel like they learned anything?
Some agreed, some disagreed

- I think it's a great idea; I am all for encouraging students to look past their immediate circumstances and think about important life issues as well as be vulnerable and have real conversations with each other, and I think this project will help foster just that. So glad you had the idea to implement it.

Worksheet 2

Apply external evidence evaluation models to evidence.

1. What is the evidence
2. Where is it on pyramid
3. What is the relevance to each programming component
4. What is the quality

What additional external evidence can you evaluate?

<https://wellbeingcollaborative.wfu.edu/collaborate/access-resources-2/>



5. Applying the models to your programs

- You have:
 - Operationalized your constructs
 - Mapped your program
 - Evaluated internal evidence for context
 - Evaluated external evidence for programs-in-general
- Now it's time to integrate

Worksheet 1: 8b-13b

- What does your internal and external evidence say about each of your program components? Is there evidence to support each component? Is there evidence contradicting any components? Maybe no evidence one way or the other?

- What are you noticing about the process?
Is it easy? Hard? Boring? Interesting?
- What is helping you in this process?
- What was easy?
- What did you struggle with?
- W1 Q14: Make notes now so you can accurately plan later

- Overall, what did you find?
- Where are you missing evidence? Where do you have a lot of evidence?
- What program components need further development?
- W1 Q15: Summarize your thoughts



6. Implementation feasibility on your campus

Be relevant,
be useful,
be heard



- You'll never do all the things.
- How do you choose priorities, make time, and set realistic expectations?
- Careful thought now will help you make concrete progress later.

- W1 Q16: Which of these exercises has seemed most immediately relevant to your work?
- Why? What do you think the benefits will be?

- W1 Q17: Which of these exercises has seemed the most feasible?
- What time do you have?
- Whose help can you access?
- What other resources do you have?

- W1 Q18: Where is the overlap between Q16 & Q17? These are the things you're more likely to do soon.
- How can you make the most out of that overlap?
- What benefit will those activities have?
- Who will want to know about them?

- W1 Q19: What do you do with the things you can't do right away?
- What are the drawbacks of never doing them?
- The benefits of doing them?
- How can you get the resources you need?

WellbeingCollaborative.wfu.edu

The **Wellbeing Collaborative** at Wake Forest University aims to improve university supports for wellbeing by facilitating collaborative, translational, multidisciplinary research.

- Listserv
- Start of some open-access resources
- National survey free for one last year
- Research collaboration opportunities