Beyond Mental Health

Exploring the pandemic’s impacts on student wellbeing, identity, agency, meaning, and purpose

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Land Acknowledgment

The land on which Wake Forest University now resides and the land on which the original campus resided served for centuries as a place for exchange and interaction for Indigenous peoples, specifically Saura, Catawba, Cherokee, and Lumbee, in its current location; and Shakori, Eno, Sissipahaw, and Occaneechi, in the original campus location. Today Wake Forest continues to be a place of learning and engagement for Indigenous students, faculty, and staff regionally, nationally, and globally.
The analyses presented today were funded by CLTE. Measure design, data collection, and data conditioning were funded by Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina and the Reynolds American Foundation.
The authors of this work hold a range of majoritized and minoritized identities. We acknowledge that these identities grant us privileges and biases of which we are not aware. One of our goals today is to generate critical discussion & elevate the work of others.
AGENDA

01. Goals & research questions

02. Methods: measures, participants, statistical modeling

03. Findings

04. Transferability & future directions: Practice implications
With three administrations of existing, pre-/during-pandemic Wellbeing Assessment data

**Theory-driven data mining**

Use a combination of theory and exploratory statistical modeling to develop practice-informative models

**Practice-informative models**

Work with practice experts (like you!) to develop concrete, actionable steps

**Translation to practice**
Research Questions

1. What changed during the pandemic?
   How were subjective wellbeing, identity, agency, meaning, and purpose affected by the pandemic?

2. Where can we intervene?
   How do subjective wellbeing, identity, agency, meaning, and purpose fit together?
WELLBEING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Development cycle: 2014 - 2019

Developmentally relevant
For traditionally-aged undergraduate students

Research-supported
To be assessable and impactful

University-supportable
"Movable" through university policies, practices, procedures, and programs
WELLBEING ASSESSMENT DIMENSIONS

- Meaning
- Purpose
- Academic engagement
- Positive coping
- Belonging
- Life satisfaction
- Friends
- Activity engagement
- Optimism
- Perseverance
- Self-esteem
- Happiness
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Loneliness
- Social anxiety
- Civic orientation - moral
- Civic orientation - political
- Demographics
- Care & safety
- Health & substances
29,429 undergraduate students

1. Spring 2019
2. Spring 2020
3. Fall 2020
RQ1: What changed?

Series of one-way and two-way ANOVAs for 19 DVs and 33 IV levels (2,337) comparisons. Benjamini-Hochberg procedure to set false discovery rate at 5%.

See the items at: https://wellbeingcollaborative.wfu.edu/2020-survey/frequently-asked-questions-2/#questionnaire

RQ2: Where can we intervene?

Exploratory path modeling with extracted factor scores (bifactor model for subjective wellbeing; CFA for 10 factors) and single-item indicators (identity, agency, and others). For all models, CFI => .95, RMSEA = < .05, SRMR =< .05. Retained paths with standardized parameter estimates > 0.1.
How do wellbeing, identity, agency, meaning, and purpose together?

Hedge's $g$ effect sizes for differences between pre-pandemic and during-pandemic means (averages)

COVID-19 split date >= March 16, 2020
pre-covid sample = 13,553
during-covid sample = 15,876
All parameter estimates are statistically significant and have standardized values of $\geq 0.1$. This abbreviated diagram does not include all variables in the model.
This diagram is an even more simplified version of the diagram on the prior slide (the underlying model has not changed, just the picture). More variables have been left out, and some have been combined.

** Agency and identity are only partially measured.
Academic outcomes

**Identity**

**Agency**

Objective wellbeing

Meaning

Coping

Optimism

Subjective wellbeing

Purpose

Academic outcomes

** Agency and identity are only partially measured.**

This diagram is an even more simplified version of the diagram on the prior slide (the underlying model has not changed, just the picture). More variables have been left out, and some have been combined.
**Identity**  
**Agency**

- Meaning
- Coping
- Optimism
- Subjective wellbeing
- Purpose
- Academic outcomes

**Agency and identity are only partially measured.**

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Academic outcomes

**Identity**

Subjective wellbeing

Agency and identity are only partially measured.

**Agency** worked to define goals, actionable plans

Purpose

Academic outcomes

Meaning

Coping

Optimism

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**Identity**
- "my life matters, I know what I find meaningful, sense of how I fit in the world"

**Agency**

Meaning
- Coping
- Subjective wellbeing

Purpose
- Academic outcomes

Optimism
This diagram is an even more simplified version of the diagram on the prior slide (the underlying model has not changed, just the picture). More variables have been left out, and some have been combined.

**Agency and identity are only partially measured.**
3 Ps of Learned Optimism

Positive events = permanent, pervasive, personal
Negative events = impermanent, isolated, impersonal

Permanent
Is the event forever? Or is this an unusual occurrence?

Pervasive
Is this event a reflection of who you are as a person? Or is it just about a brief instance of behavior?

Personal
Is the event about you? Or something outside of yourself?

Martin Seligman, 2nd ed, 2006
Example Using Class Conversations

PERMANENT, PERSUASIVE, PERSONAL

01 Optimism > positive event
Everyone got an A on the midterm! I am impressed by how good your study skills, persistence, and determination are!

02 Pessimism > positive event
Everyone got an A on the midterm. You all must have gotten lucky this one time.

IMPERMANENT, ISOLATED, IMPERSONAL
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Optimism &gt; positive event</th>
<th>Pessimism &gt; negative event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Everyone got an A on the midterm! I am impressed by how good your study skills, persistence, and determination are!</td>
<td>No one got an A on the midterm. Obviously, you all have bad study skills that need to be improved before you fail at life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Everyone got an A on the midterm. You all must have gotten lucky this one time.</td>
<td>No one got an A on the midterm. Let's chalk this up to covid interfering with our best study skills, and let's find a way to responsibly improve for next time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Let's dig deeper!

Is optimism really an accessible, pervasive, teachable intervention?

How feasible is training and intervention with faculty and staff (and not just students)?

What else might work? What are you seeing in the models? Or the measures?
Key References


Wellbeing Assessment technical reports for spring 2019, spring 2020, fall 2020: https://wellbeingcollaborative.wfu.edu/the-wellbeing-assessment/technical-reports/