

Wellness Day for Agricultural and Environmental Education Capstone Course

Dr. Kathryn Teixeira
2139 Meyer Hall
One Shields Avenue
Davis, CA 95616
530.754.2352
kteixeira@ucdavis.edu

Introduction/Need for Idea

The Agricultural Education profession has documented and studied the effects of agricultural and vocational agriculture teacher burnout for more than 30 years (Chenevey et al., 2008; Croom, 2003; Newcomb, et al., 1987; Smith & Smalley, 2018). While the profession recognizes burnout as an issue amongst teachers, most solutions include finding “balance” between ones career and personal life. In fact, the 2011 November/December issue of the *Agricultural Education Magazine* highlighted multiple articles by authors advising how to balance a career and personal life. In this issue, Boone (2011) stated “The balance between work and life can be a tenuous one, but your long-term happiness and health depends on it” (p. 2). While we continue to discuss the effects of burnout, rarely do we talk about what health means in the context of agricultural teaching.

Well-being and individual wellness should be at the forefront of conversations as teacher educators continue to work with future agricultural education teachers. One positive change that came from the COVID-19 pandemic is how we understand and talk more about mental and emotional well-being (Optum, 2024). The Global Wellness Institute defines wellness as “an active process of being aware and making choices that lead toward an outcome of optimal holistic health and wellbeing” (para. 5, 2024). With the need to address agricultural teacher burnout, and the ever-growing challenge of balancing work and personal lives, the Agricultural and Environmental Education Major at University of California, Davis (UC Davis) developed a Wellness Day activity to allow students to invest time to learn about and practice the *Eight Dimensions of Wellness*.

How it Works

Starting with resources provided by the UC Davis Student Health and Counseling Services, we created a workbook with descriptions of the *Eight Dimensions of Wellness* and guiding questions and activities to encourage practice within the dimensions. The *Eight Dimensions of Wellness* include emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational, physical, spiritual, and social. The workbook is designed as a resource for students to read and reflect on the *Eight Dimensions of Wellness*. It is a non-graded element of the Wellness Day, as there are places within the workbook for students to share personal stories and reflect on past and current struggles. Additionally, it serves as a guide for students during the Wellness Day activity with instructions for each of the *Eight Dimensions of Wellness* stations.

During the latter part of the spring term (usually within the last two weeks of class), students are invited to attend their regularly scheduled class at the UC Davis Arboretum and Public Garden. The UC Davis Arboretum and Public Garden is often used by students for recreational activities including frisbee and walking, but for this setting, it provides a serene quiet area for students to be reflective and get away from the four walls of a traditional classroom.

The first half of the two-hour activity includes discussion about the *Eight Dimensions of Wellness* and students participate in Think-Pair-Share opportunities surrounding chosen dimensions. During the second half of the activity, students were split equally amongst and progressed through six stations, each focusing on one of the *Eight Dimensions of Wellness* outlined in the workbook. The student workbook included directions for each of the stations as

well as space for the students to write or draw if it was included with the station. The amount of time students spent at each station was about 10 minutes.

Results to Date

Wellness Day has now been held three times (Spring 2022, 2023, 2024) for the Capstone in Agricultural and Environmental Education at UC Davis. Each year, students share how much they appreciate the opportunity to have a day to re-center their thoughts and take time to focus on their individual well-being. Students expressed their gratitude for Wellness Day taking place during a relatively stressful time in their studies because it allowed for a change of pace and reflection on their career at UC Davis. One student reflected, “[Wellness Day] was a valuable reminder to prioritize work-life balance both while in school and in the future.” Another student said, “[Wellness Day] was a great experience that allowed us to be present and connect with classmates before graduation.”

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Future plans include a graduate follow-up to assess if students are continuing to practice and include strategies learned from the Wellness Day activity and adoption of the *Eight Dimensions of Wellness* in their professional life. We plan to apply for a university level wellness grant to provide “Ag Teacher Wellness Kits” for our students as part of the programming to serve as a reminder of the importance of self-care.

For anyone thinking about including Wellness Day as part of their capstone or senior level class curriculum, we cannot recommend it enough! It is important that we as teacher educators are talking about self-care and wellness with future educators.

Costs and Resources Needed

Table 1

Start-up List of Resources Used for Wellness Day Activity

Resources Needed	Approximate Cost
<i>Eight Dimensions of Wellness</i> Workbooks – Created and printed inhouse	Varies
Note Cards for students to write letters (3 per student)	\$15.00
Colored Pencils for Postcard Activity (3 sets of 12)	\$15.00
Pens and Pencils for writing (enough for all students)	\$10.00
2 Yoga Mats for Station (need 1 for every 6 students) ^a	\$20.00
Station Markers (Need 6 - We used cones) ^a	\$20.00
Shoebox Totes (5 needed - \$2.00 each) ^a	\$10.00

Note. ^aThese resources should be a one-time purchase and can be used from year to year.

The stations do take some time to organize and plan out, but once you have the boxes set-up with the resources, it makes it easier to set it all out. Additionally, if you plan to use an outside space, encourage students to prepare for the elements and bring water, sunscreen and a blanket or chair to use.

References

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