Student Experience and Opportunity Plan
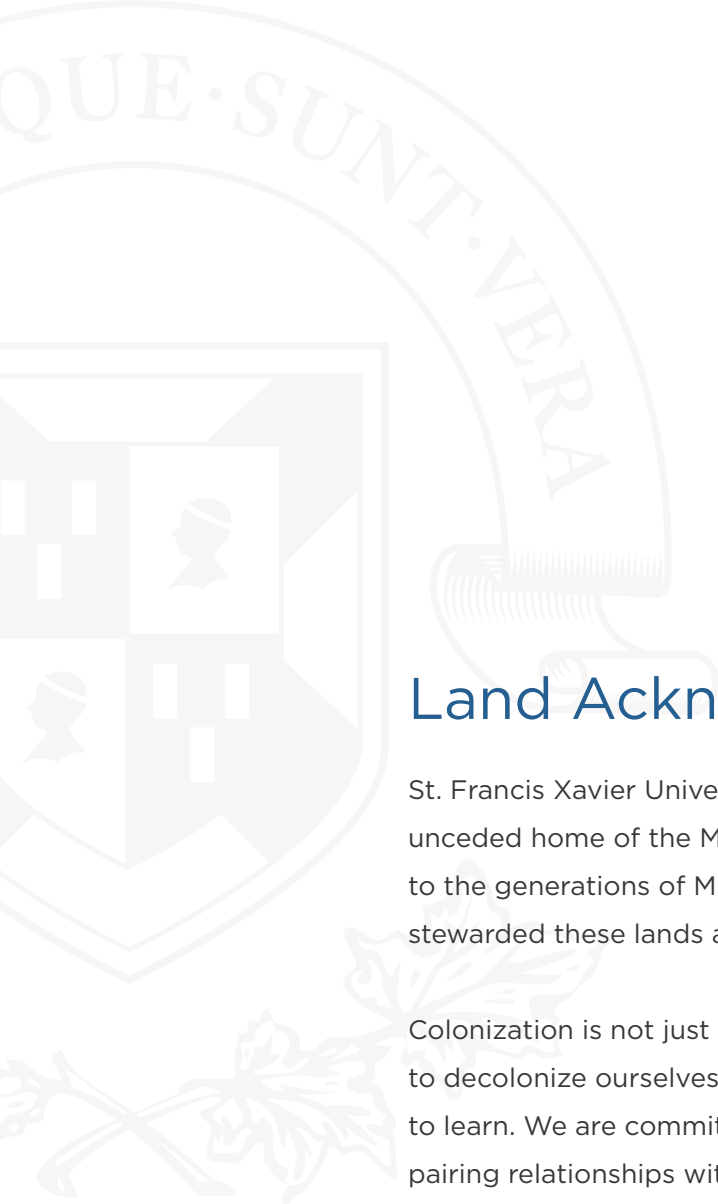
St. Francis Xavier University

QUAECUMQUE·SUNT·VERA

StFX University values sustainability.
As a whole campus, we will engage
in the important conversations about
mental health and wellbeing, and
each do our part in creating a campus
environment in which all students,
faculty, and staff can flourish. The
woven fabric incorporated throughout
our integrated planning framework
is a representation of the collective
commitment to engage in the work
that must be done to achieve our
vision: to build our University the
way it is meant to be.

Land Acknowledgement

St. Francis Xavier University stands on the lands of Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded home of the Mi'kmaw. We express our deep gratitude and appreciation to the generations of Mi'kmaw who, since time immemorial, have loved and stewarded these lands and the beings who call them home.

Colonization is not just history; it exists in the present tense. While we strive to decolonize ourselves and our institution, we know there is still much for us to learn. We are committed to doing the hard work of self-reflection and to repairing relationships with the Mi'kmaw on whose lands we reside, including embracing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and embodying their spirit in our day-to-day lives.

Ms~t wiaqpulti'kl ankukamkewe'l | We are all treaty people

Message from the Vice-President, Students

StFX University is committed to supporting wholistic student success and well-being. This is outlined in the *University Strategic Plan* and our work is continuing: "As a whole campus, we will engage in the important conversations about mental health and wellbeing, and each do our part in creating a campus environment in which all students, faculty, and staff can flourish" (StFX University Strategic Plan 2023-28). As part of our ongoing efforts, I am pleased to present the StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan. This Strategic Plan sets out commitments that will drive the priorities for the student culture and experience at StFX over the next 5 years. The goals and objectives are rooted in our shared vision: to build our University the way it is meant to be.

The student experience is a source of pride for StFX University. StFX graduates are highly sought-after throughout their careers, in part because they have acquired exceptional skills, including critical thinking, adaptable problem-solving, and innovative leadership during their studies. These skills are built in our classrooms, libraries, studios and labs, but also in our student clubs, on our sports teams, during intramurals, through the arts, within student government, and across the whole student experience. The StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan recognizes StFX's strengths, and sets new directions for an even brighter, bolder future. We look to maintain new aspects of the culture we supported during the pandemic, reinvigorate the strengths of our student experience which sets StFX apart from other universities, and adapt to meet the

changing needs of our community to build a student culture and experience that is more energized, equitable and inclusive than ever before.

Enabling and supporting wholistic student success and well-being is at the heart of our programs and services to create an outstanding student culture and experience. To achieve this goal, we will focus on optimizing the first-year experience, strengthening mental health support and services, and leveraging experiential and co-curricular learning as opportunities to enrich students' overall education and contribute to their success. We recognize not everyone has had the same opportunities due to systemic, societal oppression and exclusion and we are committed to addressing systemic inequities and removing barriers so that everyone may flourish, especially members of historically and currently excluded groups.

The StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan is informed by a combination of research and best practices in student affairs, as well as the valuable ideas, input and experiences shared by students, faculty and staff through campus-wide consultations. Collectively, this input has shaped the vision of the StFX student experience as a university community of people, places and spaces that empower all students flourishing. This Plan identifies the ways in which our institution will work to cultivate a flourishing campus, where we intentionally create living and learning environments that inspire, engage and enrich the whole student as they embark on their educational journey. Our individual efforts will be strengthened through our commitment to working together to realize our shared vision and strategic initiatives. This is important work. On behalf of the StFX Senate Quality of Life Committee, I look forward to continuing to collaborate with faculty, staff, administrative leaders and students as we move forward.

Elizabeth Yeo
Vice-President, Students
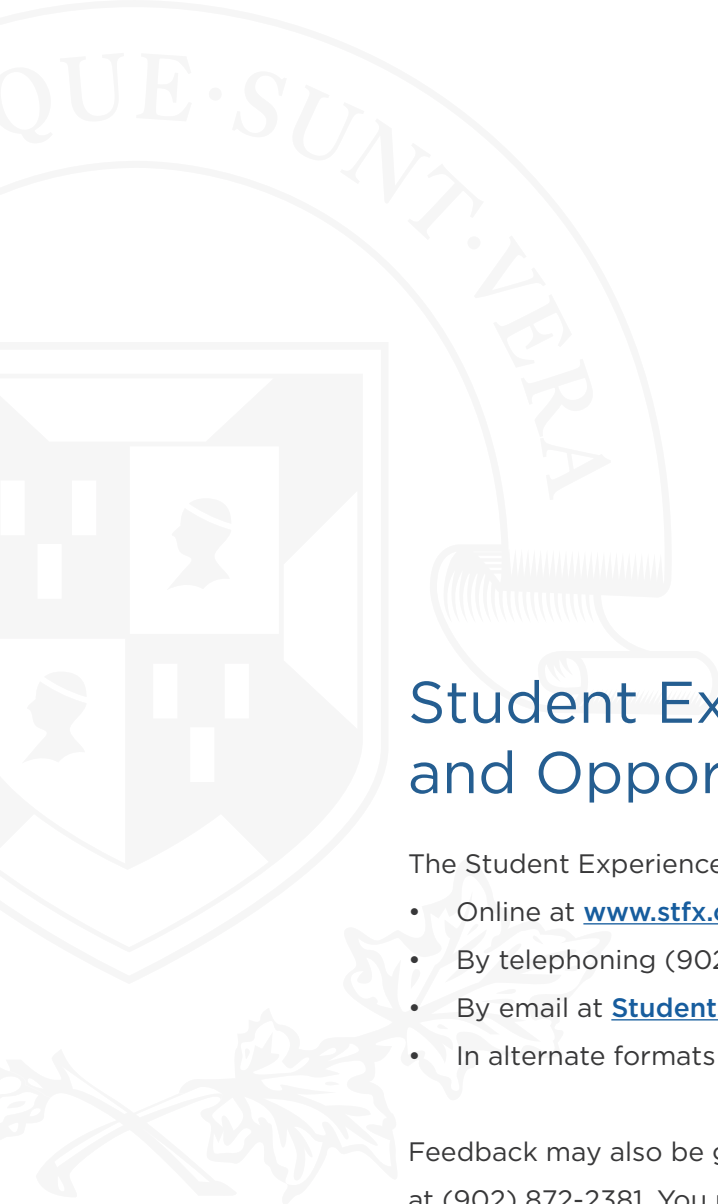
Student Experience and Opportunity Plan

The Student Experience and Opportunity Plan is available

- Online at **www.stfx.ca/StrategicInitiatives**
- By telephoning (902) 867-2381
- By email at **StudentServices@stfx.ca**
- In alternate formats as requested

Feedback may also be given by emailing **StudentServices@stfx.ca**, by telephone at (902) 872-2381. You may also send feedback via regular mail:

StFX Student Services

5555 Union Place

Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada

B2G 2W5

Introduction

The StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan has emerged at an extraordinary time in the history of StFX University. As we continue to navigate the uncertainties of a global pandemic together, we are acutely aware of the increasingly complex challenges in the day-to-day lives of our students. These challenges are portrayed in popular media, illustrated in research findings, and all too often, experienced first-hand. We are also keenly aware of students' potential for strength, resiliency, adaptability and of their deep concern for their friends, peers, and the broader community.

Understanding that the needs of students are varied, dynamic, and complex, this Plan takes a whole campus approach to cultivating a student culture and experience that supports all students flourishing. Our students are drawn to StFX because of the potential to be socially engaged and find belonging in a strong community of people who share common values and interests. We will continue to leverage these strengths. However, we also recognize that the living and learning environment has unique challenges and dynamics that can impact wholistic[1] student success and well-being. We must address these aspects of our culture if we are to create the conditions under which all students can flourish.

Our vision is for all Xaverians to discover their personalized pathway through StFX's rich, wholistic learning environment; engage in courageous conversations with our diverse community; serve their community on and off campus; and, develop the skills to flourish throughout their degree and after graduation.

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[1] Wholistic is spelled throughout this document with "wh" to affirm it is derived from the concept of wholeness. This is a decolonial concept derived from the research of Kathleen Absolon. See: Absolon, K. (2016). *Wholistic and ethical: social inclusion with Indigenous peoples.* Social Inclusion 4, (1), pp.1-13.

Taking a whole campus approach is about the whole student, recognizing the powerful link between physical health, spiritual health, emotions, behaviour, social interaction, and student academic success. It is about recognizing that mental health and well-being can fluctuate, and the focus needs to be on flourishing at university, understanding that mental well-being is much more than the absence of illness. We recognize the factors that affect mental wellness are complex – mental wellness is a continuum. Taking a wholistic approach that addresses discrimination, inequities, and social determinants of health are necessary to build and support culture of all students flourishing at StFX.

Our approach to supporting wholistic student success and well-being is one that recognizes intersectionality – the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, ableism and classism) combine, overlap or intersect, especially in the experiences of historically-excluded individuals and groups. We must inquire, listen, and learn so that our actions are informed by our communities.

In this respect, StFX recognizes that wholistic student success and well-being cannot be totally achieved through a focus on the delivery of mental health services and supports alone. StFX is known for and prides itself on a focus on the academic and personal development of students making community and social involvement a large part of the learning experience. Thus, our campus community requires a whole campus approach where services, policies and environments are examined through a lens of equity, student mental health and wellness. An integrated effort will best serve StFX students by creating a cohesive network of options that can help them flourish. This plan will enhance StFX's current strengths in prioritizing wholistic student success by embedding equity and student well-being throughout the student culture and experience.
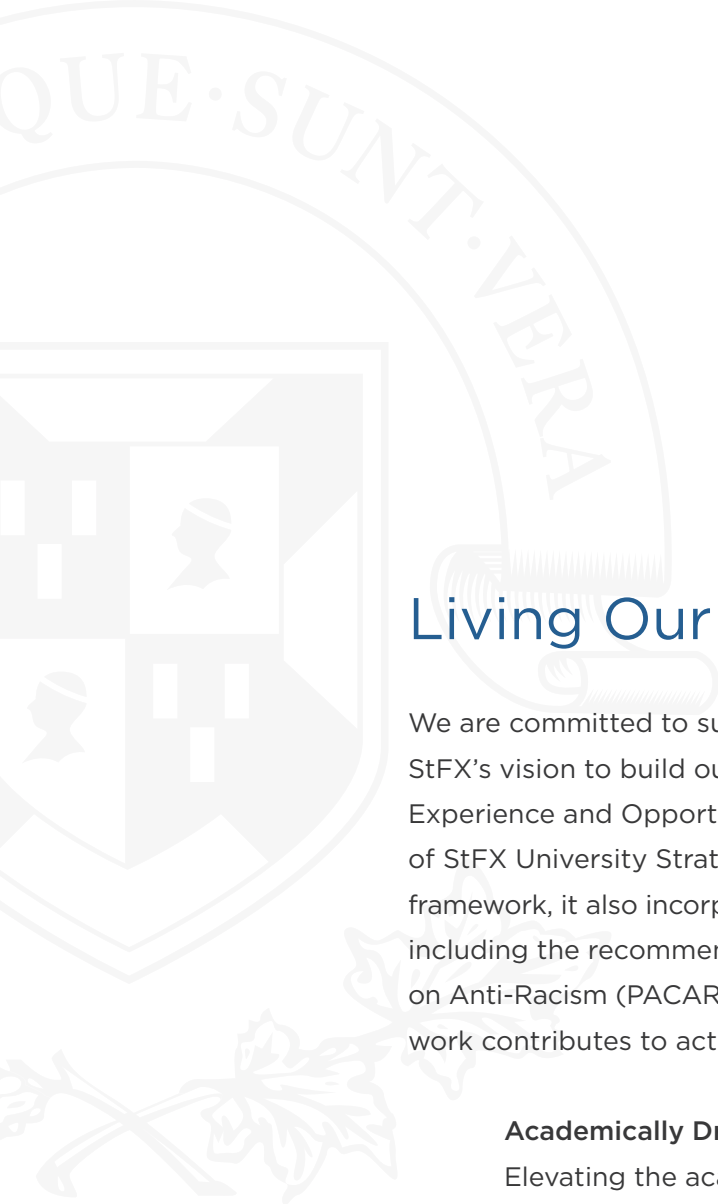
Living Our Values

We are committed to supporting students by living our values, supporting StFX's vision to build our university the way it is meant to be. The Student Experience and Opportunity Plan is designed to support the implementation of StFX University Strategic Plan (2023-28). As part of StFX's integrated planning framework, it also incorporates the recommendations of other strategic initiatives, including the recommendations identified by the President's Action Committee on Anti-Racism (PACAR) Action Plan and StFX Accessibility Plan. Collectively, our work contributes to actioning StFX University's values:

Academically Driven
Elevating the academic mission of the University to be the engine of our future is critical to our overall success. To action this value, we support wholistic, strengths-based learning and development by providing opportunities for students to achieve their personal, academic and career goals, and instill passion and skills for continual exploration, learning and growth. We recognize student learning and development as a process that takes place during a student's entire university experience. By intentionally scaffolding student learning and engagement, we provide opportunities and supports to help student learning and development though all programs and years of study.

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility (EDIA)
As an educational institution, we work proactively to embed practices related to equity, anti-racism, and accessibility in all aspects of our University culture, curriculum, and experience. To action this value, we create learning environments grounded in respect and support,

guided by a shared responsibility for equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility (EDIA). We draw on anti-oppression, anti-racism, and trauma-informed practices, as well as accessibility and universal design, to cultivate equity, access, inclusion and sense of belonging, through an intersectional lens. Taking a wholistic approach that addresses discrimination, inequities and social determinants of health are essential to build and support a culture of mental health and well-being at StFX.

Community

We recognize that we are part of a collective and that we have responsibilities to and for each other. To action this value, our work is supported by and in collaboration. With students at the centre, we work to evolve our programs, services and resources to meet their needs. Together, we support a rich, vibrant student experience.

Responsive

We commit to working with students and our partners to ensure we remain responsive, relevant, and accountable to our communities in pursuit of common goals. To action this value, we acknowledge diversity in student lived experience and proactively respond to evolving student-centric needs in order to provide services, supports and experiences that are personalized and adaptive. We draw on assessment, data, research and consultation to improve our planning, processes and decision-making.

Sustainability

As a whole campus, we engage in the important conversations about mental health and wellbeing, and each do our part in creating a campus environment in which all students, faculty, and staff can flourish. To action this value, we understand student well-being as a continuum of mental and physical health concerns that may affect people during their lives. We intentionally and proactively centre student well-being by considering the whole student's experience, highlighting culturally responsive and trauma-informed pathways to care, and building individual and institutional capacity to support wholistic student success and well-being.

Our Approach

The learning experiences and well-being of students is significantly impacted by interrelated physical, cultural, spiritual, policies, socio-economic, and organizational contextual factors[2]. StFX is committed to providing space for all students to develop skills and promote learning. To do that well, we must adopt a Plan that not only responds to individual concerns but also makes wholistic student success and well-being a priority in all that we do.

We heard from members of our university community that student well-being must be a priority – in our classrooms, across our campus, in our policies and through our actions. We need a coordinated, collaborative approach across the university that focuses on our strengths and gives us the opportunity to be leaders and champions for supporting all students flourishing. This Plan amplifies and systematizes the significant work that has been done to date, the commitments of our faculty and staff to the student experience, and their efforts to leverage our strengths and elevate wholistic student success and wellness on our campus – we are all in this together.

There is no one-size-fits all model for supporting wholistic student success and well-being – everyone's experience is unique. That is why we view the whole university as the domain to be addressed. Our approach is about:

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[2] Silverman, D., Underhile, R., Keeling, R. (2008). Student Health Reconsidered: A Radical Proposal for Thinking Differently About Health Related Programs and Services for *Students. Student Health Spectrum*, June 2008, AETNA Student Health.

- Building and supporting an environment at StFX conducive to all students flourishing that is grounded in the values of equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility.
- Recognizing and responding to the social determinants of health; taking a wholistic approach that addresses inequities to build and support a culture of student wellness.
- Promoting agency through wholistic student engagement, understanding that learning can be intentionally programmed through all of the places where students engage at StFX.
- Harnessing a developmental and proactive approach, initiating early and frequent connections with students to support transition and persistence through to graduation.

Continuum of Care Model

At StFX, we understand that mental well-being exists on a continuum that recognizes the full spectrum of all mental and physical health concerns that may affect people during their lives. An individual without a diagnosed mental illness can still experience fluctuations in their mental health[3]. Likewise, people living with mental illnesses can still have good mental health, if the right environmental conditions and supports are in place.

Our preferred continuum model moves from healthy adaptive coping (green) to mild and self-limiting distress or functional impairment (yellow) to more severe, persistent injury or impairment (orange) and clinical illnesses and disorders that require more concentrated medical care (red). The arrow along the four colour blocks indicates health is a continuum and the state of one's health can move back and forth. Mental wellness is not static. Many people have physical and

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[3] Keyes, C. L. M. (2007). Promoting and protecting mental health as flourishing: A complementary strategy for improving national mental health. *American Psychologist,* 62(2), 95–108.

mental health concerns that – when identified and treated early – can be temporary and reversible. Even if injured or ill, it is possible to return to healthy and achieve a high level of functioning if the right supports and environment surrounds them.
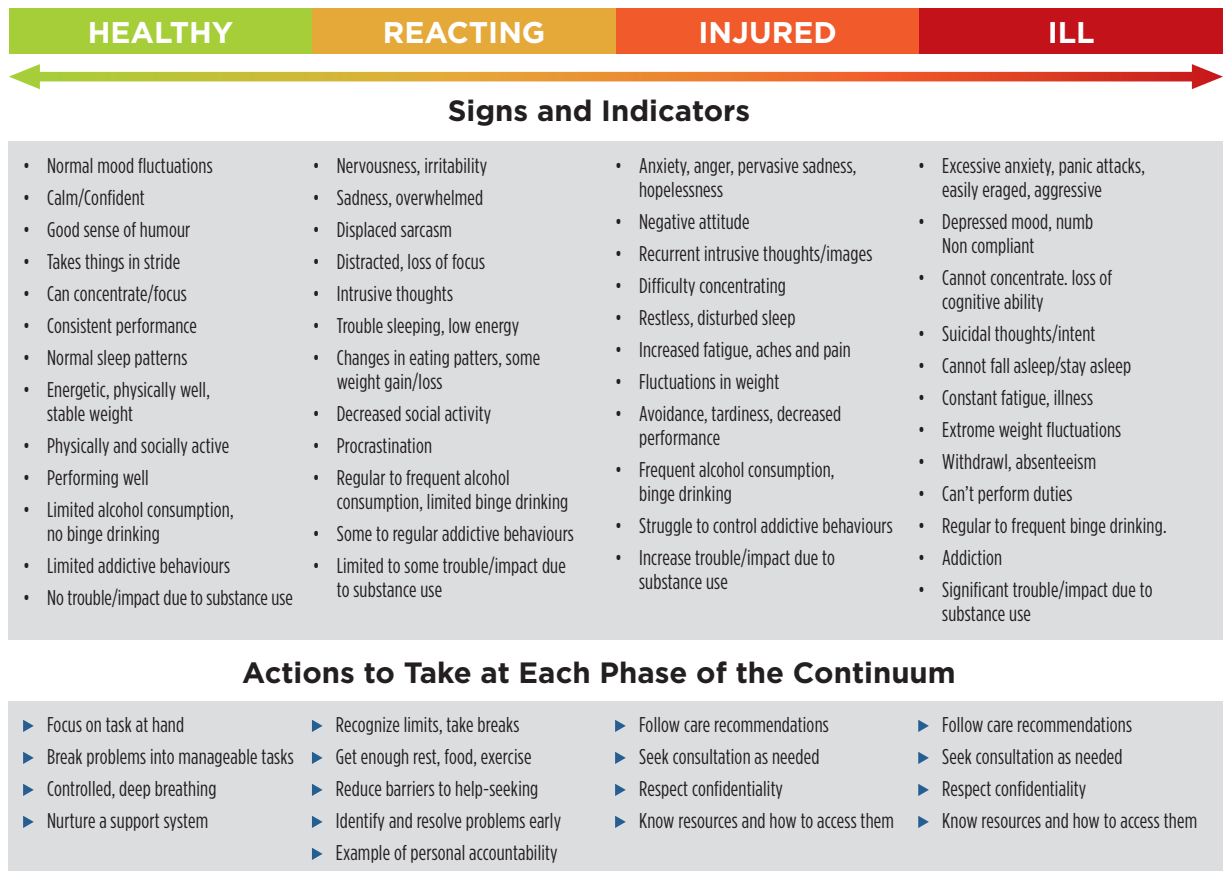
HEALTHY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL

Signs and Indicators

• Normal mood fluctuations	• Nervousness, irritability	• Anxiety, anger, pervasive sadness, hopelessness	• Excessive anxiety, panic attacks, easily eraged, aggressive
• Calm/Confident	• Sadness, overwhelmed	• Negative attitude	• Depressed mood, numb Non compliant
• Good sense of humour	• Displaced sarcasm	• Recurrent intrusive thoughts/images	• Cannot concentrate. loss of cognitive ability
• Takes things in stride	• Distracted, loss of focus	• Difficulty concentrating	
• Can concentrate/focus	• Intrusive thoughts	• Restless, disturbed sleep	• Suicidal thoughts/intent
• Consistent performance	• Trouble sleeping, low energy	• Increased fatigue, aches and pain	• Cannot fall asleep/stay asleep
• Normal sleep patterns	• Changes in eating patters, some weight gain/loss	• Fluctuations in weight	• Constant fatigue, illness
• Energetic, physically well, stable weight	• Decreased social activity	• Avoidance, tardiness, decreased performance	• Extrome weight fluctuations
• Physically and socially active	• Procrastination	• Frequent alcohol consumption, binge drinking	• Withdrawl, absenteeism
• Performing well	• Regular to frequent alcohol consumption, limited binge drinking	• Struggle to control addictive behaviours	• Can't perform duties
• Limited alcohol consumption, no binge drinking	• Some to regular addictive behaviours	• Increase trouble/impact due to substance use	• Regular to frequent binge drinking.
• Limited addictive behaviours	• Limited to some trouble/impact due to substance use		• Addiction
• No trouble/impact due to substance use			• Significant trouble/impact due to substance use

Actions to Take at Each Phase of the Continuum

▶ Focus on task at hand	▶ Recognize limits, take breaks	▶ Follow care recommendations	▶ Follow care recommendations
▶ Break problems into manageable tasks	▶ Get enough rest, food, exercise	▶ Seek consultation as needed	▶ Seek consultation as needed
▶ Controlled, deep breathing	▶ Reduce barriers to help-seeking	▶ Respect confidentiality	▶ Respect confidentiality
▶ Nurture a support system	▶ Identify and resolve problems early	▶ Know resources and how to access them	▶ Know resources and how to access them
	▶ Example of personal accountability		

Figure 1: Mental Health Continuum[4]

Given the breadth of factors that impact mental wellness, concerns about student mental health and well-being cannot be effectively addressed through a focus on the delivery of mental health services and programs alone. This Plan takes a much broader approach that requires examination of institutional drivers as well as the need to look beyond the university to community partners to connect students with appropriate supports and services.

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[4] Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2017). *Mental Health Continuum Model.* Retrieved from https://theworkingmind.ca/sites/default/files/resources/r²mr_poster_en.pdf

Based in this evidence-informed framework, StFX has adopted a Continuum of Care model which is a flexible and comprehensive system for delivering programs, resources and services for supporting wholistic student mental health and well-being. This model helps to ensure that students have access to the care and resources they want and need, regardless of where they find themselves on the mental health continuum.

The components of the model highlight a student-centric approach, with a focus on prevention and the reduction of stigma. Students can engage with any part of the Continuum of Care, or multiple parts of the continuum at the same time. Intensity can be increased or decreased depending on the level of distress, need and readiness to engage in the process. Programs can also be selected and arranged based on need. There is no starting point or finish line – only resources and supports that deliver the right care at the right time. Together, the model supports an integrated system with the ability to effectively build and support mental health and well-being across the continuum of care.

Below is a description of the Continuum of Care Model. We encourage you – students, parents and supporters, faculty and staff to learn about the new model and explore the resources available in our community.
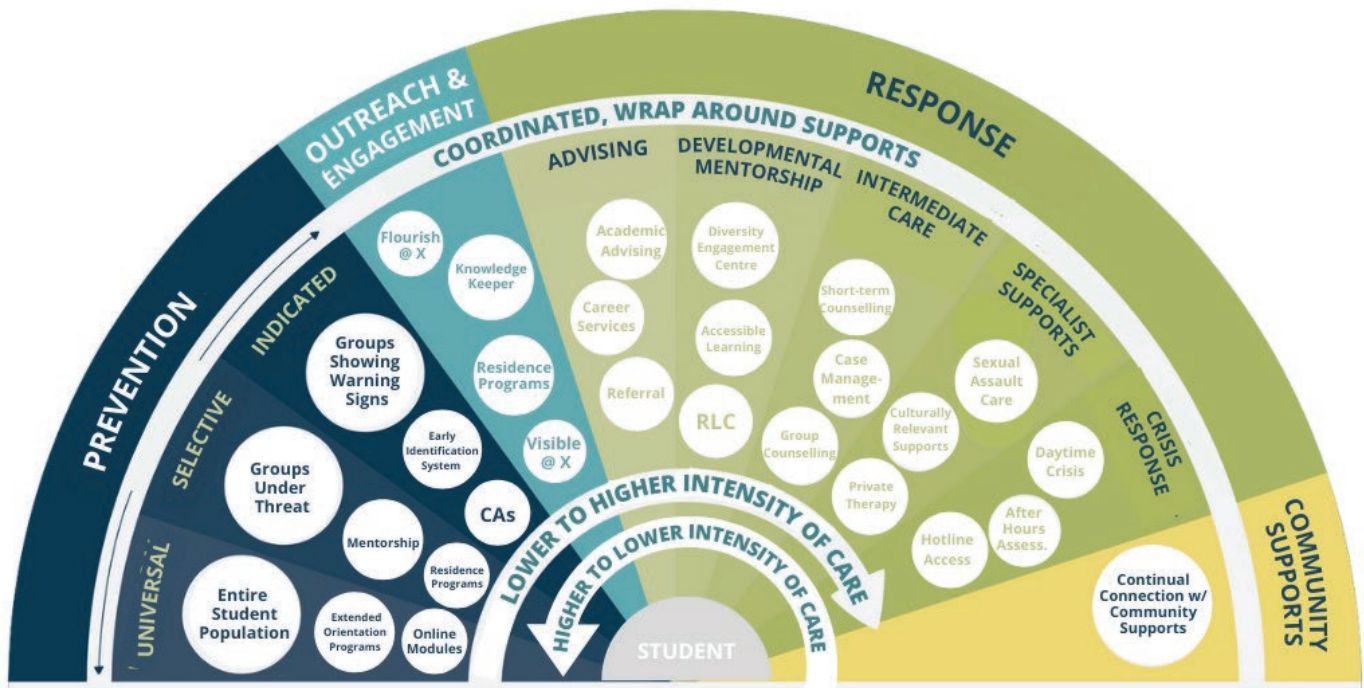
Figure 2: StFX Continuum of Care Model

Priority Areas

StFX is a unique environment, and we are proud of what differentiates us from other post-secondary institutions. We believe in and embrace our commitment **to build our university the way it is meant to be.** We also recognize that the living and learning environment at StFX has unique challenges and dynamics that can impact student wholistic student success and well-being.

We aspire to create the conditions for all students to feel supported and be well and to be guided to opportunities to explore and develop their strengths and talents. We have examined and researched many approaches and strategies to inform our work. We heard from students, staff and faculty that we need to prioritize mental health literacy, develop students' capacity to manage stress and develop resiliency skills, ensure ongoing communication of available resources and services, review policies and practices from an anti-racism and trauma-

informed lens, and ensure that proactive support for student mental health and well-being is integrated into all facets of our university culture and experience. Understanding that the needs of students are varied, dynamic and complex, this Plan takes a whole campus approach to all students flourishing. To achieve this vision we will build understanding, capacity and connection across the StFX community and with the external community.

| BUILD UNDERSTANDING	BUILD CAPACITY	BUILD CONNECTION
We will educate students, faculty and staff about student mental health issues and barriers, and create the motivation to engage in skill development and support change. We will support StFX to achieve an equitable and respectful culture that reflects the values of our institution, and the wellness needs of our communities, in particular students from historically and currently excluded groups. This includes Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+, international students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities.	We will create an environment where our focus on wholistic student success and well-being is apparent in our priorities, policies, practices and environment. We will strengthen our programs and services to support students in their well-being. We will create opportunities for skill development and having conversations about well-being. In doing so, we will create the conditions for those experiencing difficulty to seek and gain support before harm occurs.	By leveraging internal and external partnerships – and ensuring ongoing communication and engagement – we will seek opportunities to create meaningful connections and improve access and opportunity for students while at university and in their local communities.

Learning Goals

We understand that learning can be intentionally programmed across all of the places where students engage at StFX. By defining shared learning goals and scaffolding intentional learning experiences across the student lifecycle, we will support all students in achieving their current and lifelong academic, personal and career goals, which depending on the focus, includes undergraduate and graduate students; part-time and full-time students; mature students; international and domestic students.

Research identifies five key factors post-secondary administrators and educators can foster by maximizing the academic, interpersonal and intrapersonal development of students. These five factors are positive perspective (optimism about the future), academic determination (investment of effort to reach educational goals), engaged learning (engagement in the process of learning), social connectedness (healthy connection to others) and diverse citizenship (commitment to making a difference in the world)[5].

By taking a whole campus approach, StFX has the opportunity to intentionally support wholistic student success and well-being across all five factors. Across our departments, programs, services and environments, we commit to helping students develop in these ways – whether it be through involvement in on-campus employment, volunteering for student government, or attending a program in residence. This is part of supporting the development of a whole campus approach to all students flourishing because it enables us to determine whether our programs, supports and services are supporting wholistic student success and well-being. Throughout our collective work, we seek to cultivate Xaverians who are distinguished by the following characteristics*: *Student Services will continue to evolve and define these co-curricular learning goals to align with the curricular learning goals as they are defined in the StFX Academic Plan.

LEARNING GOAL	CHARACTERISTICS
Critical Thinkers	Students who are curious, engaged and reflective.
Future-Focused Planners	Students who are goal-oriented, motivated and self-directed.
Adaptable Problem-Solvers	Students who are hopeful, self-determined, resourceful and creative.
Community-Minded	Students who are relational, empathetic, collaborative and self-aware.
Engaged Citizens	Students who are equitable, globally aware and socially responsible.
Innovative Leaders	Students who exhibit integrity, judgement and intercultural competency.

[5] Schreiner, L.A., Louis, M.C. and Nelson, D.D. (Eds). (2020). *Thriving in Transitions: A research-based approach to college student success* (2nd ed.), University of South Carolina, National Resource Centre for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.
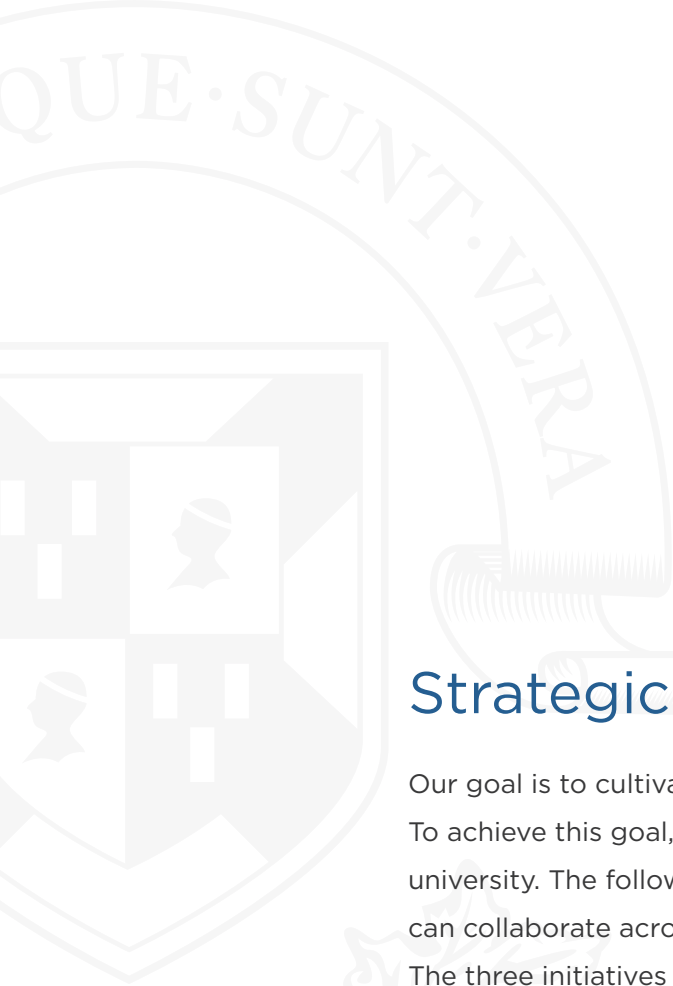
Strategic Initiatives

Our goal is to cultivate a whole campus approach to all students flourishing. To achieve this goal, we need to broaden and coordinate efforts across the university. The following three strategic initiatives identify the ways that we can collaborate across divisional boundaries to cultivate a flourishing campus. The three initiatives are:

1) **Optimize the first-year student experience**
2) **Strengthen mental health and well-being supports and services**
3) **Foster early and on-going engagement with, and recognition of, experiential and co-curricular learning**

Achieving these initiatives will help to ensure that StFX is on track to deliver upon the priorities outlined in the Student Experience and Opportunity Plan. These initiatives will be supported by the following five priority actions:

1. **Develop an Integrated Mentorship Model:** Develop an integrated, proactive mentorship program that will support student transition by cultivating meaningful connections that support all students to discover their personalized pathways to success and provide early alert for those who could benefit from supportive interventions.

2. **Create an Extended Student Orientation and Transition Program:** Create an Extended Orientation and Transitions Program by frontloading resources, supports and programs in first year and intentionally scaffolding student learning and engagement as part of an immersive, learning-focused experience through all years of study.

3. **Formalize Collaborative, Wrap Around Supports:** Advance a wholistic approach to student mental health and well-being, that facilitates access to both proactive and responsive services and fosters an integrated philosophy of evident care to support wholistic student success and well-being.

4. **Create Opportunities for All Students to Participate in Meaningful Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning:** Facilitate guided learning opportunities for all students that proactively advance common learning goals across living and learning environments. Cultivate agency by engaging students in the process of discovering their strengths and personalized pathways to wholistic success and well-being.

5. **Radically Welcome and Engage Students from Historically Excluded Groups:** Radically welcome students by advancing equitable access to culturally relevant, trauma-informed programs, resources and services for students from historically and currently excluded populations. Foster belonging by creating opportunities for community and connection across diverse and intersectional identities.

1. Optimize the First Year Experience

Goals:

- Frontload resources, supports and programs in first year and intentionally scaffold student learning and engagement as part of an immersive first-year learning experience.

- Develop an integrated developmental mentorship program and systems to create meaningful connections and enable all students to discover their trengths and personalized pathways to success. Provide early alert for those who could benefit from supportive interventions.

- Strengthen a student culture of health, safety and wellness by cultivating personal and bystander awareness, knowledge and skills.

- Radically welcome and engage students from historically and currently excluded populations by creating opportunities for students to cultivate a sense of belonging. This includes Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+, international students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities.

Initiatives:

1.1   Create a New Student Experience Framework that maps intentional co-curricular student engagement and learning opportunities throughout the entire first-year experience. This framework will be developed in partnership with Academics and Student Services, working together to support academic transition and wholistic student success.
Build Understanding

1.2 Collaborate with the Students' Union, academic units and other campus and community partners to develop and deliver an evidence-informed Orientation Program, based in student flourishing. Identify and remove barriers to participation in Orientation Week. Integrate opportunities to learn about and share diverse cultural identities and a welcoming community of authentic belonging.
Build Understanding

1.3 Embed equity, anti-racism and accessibility in the development and execution of special student-facing events, and programming (Extended Orientation Programming, Homecoming, etc.). This should include the development and implementation of specific engagement programs designed for members of historically and currently excluded communities, as well as programming that provides all students with culturally relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes.
Build Understanding

1.4 Develop high-quality co-curricular learning experiences and transitions programming for off-campus, mature, distance learning, transfer students and student athletes that enrich their student experience.
Build Understanding

1.5 Coordinate a Winter transitions program to welcome new students arriving in January (often these students are international students), and re-orient all first-year students to programs, services, engagement opportunities and supports provided by StFX.
Build Understanding

1.6 Establish an ongoing partnership between StFX Student Services, Graduate Studies and StFX Online (formerly Continuing and Distance Education) to enhance understanding of the specific needs of graduate and distance learning students and deepen an understanding of their transitional needs.
Build Understanding

1.7   Develop online videos/modules for parents and supporters to be empowered to support their student in their transition to university. These same tools may be used by faculty, staff and students to understand the supports available and how to access them, and when.
Build Understanding

1.8   Leverage the "Being Xaverian" campaign as an opportunity co-create and share Xaverian community values, share stories of diverse student experiences and celebrate positive citizenship at StFX.
Build Understanding

1.9   Provide proactive programming and experiential initiatives that support harm reduction approaches to substance use and provide healthy alternatives for socializing.
Build Understanding

1.10   Collaborate with Academic to establish a transition year program to support student success (both pre-entrance and during first year), including formal (e.g., camps and courses) and informal supports (e.g., mentorship). Ensure that the program is accessible to all students and connected to surrounding communities. This program should be co-designed in consultation with students and apply evidence-informed practices, and may include:

- A Summer Bridge Program focused on academic orientation, community connection, strengths assessment, and connection with local communities.
- Tailored programming and engagement opportunities for students from historically and currently excluded groups.
- Ability to obtain ESL training and supports for international students and other students for whom English is not their first language.
- Opportunities for faculty, staff and instructors to learn and practice strategies to support wholistic student success in transition. ***Build Capacity***

1.11   Build capacity for the Residence Life Leadership Team, Diversity
        Engagement Centre, and peer leaders to frontload developmental
        mentorship and coaching in support of first-year transition and student
        success through intentional leadership development, coaching, and
        training opportunities. Mentors will have capacity to provide
        strengths-based coaching, using an anti-racism, trauma-informed,
        and accessibility lens.
        Build Capacity

1.12   Create group mentoring networks for students from historically-excluded
        groups to come together in community, share experiences, explore, and
        access academic, personal and career opportunities and pathways. This
        includes Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+ students, international
        students, first-generation students and students with disabilities.
        Build Connection

2. Strengthen Mental Health and Well-being Supports and Services

Goals:

- Increase mental health by building resilience and creating opportunities
  for skill development and the awareness of resources to mental wellness.
  We will foster an open and accepting environment that reduces stigma
  and celebrates individual and collective well-being.

- Build capacity to recognize concerns by providing students, faculty
  and staff with the knowledge and skills to recognize early warning
  signs of distress. In so doing, we will create the conditions for those
  concerned about student well-being to confidently and easily connect
  students to the appropriate supports and enhance access for those
  experiencing difficulty to seek and gain support before harm occurs.

The intent is "recognize and refer" rather than an expectation to intervene.

- Create a supportive environment where our focus on wholistic student mental health and wellness is apparent in our priorities, policies and practices.

- Advance equitable access to culturally relevant, trauma-informed, and accessible programs, resources and services to support students from historically and currently excluded groups in their well-being. Approaches will be tailored to meet the unique needs of the student groups. This includes Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+ students, international students, first-generation students and students with disabilities.

Initiatives:

2.1   Strengthen awareness of the full range of student resources available at StFX and streamline access to those resources. Ensure students have access to information about mental health and addictions services, critical care, after-hours care, and local community resources.
Build Understanding

2.2   Develop tools and resources to support administrative leaders, faculty, staff, and students in identifying signs and symptoms of distress or at-risk behaviours, and competencies in helping others by supporting those in need in accessing appropriate resources.
Build Understanding

2.3   Frontload transitional supports for all students that normalize help seeking behaviours and increase awareness about the resources available. Incorporate mental health and wellness literacy, development of resiliency, coping, and stress management skills, and awareness of campus supports and services within Orientation and Extended Orientation programming, varsity sport teams' training, etc. ***Build Understanding***

2.4   Create evidence informed frameworks that support our Residence Education programming, Alcohol and Substance Use Strategy and Mental Health & Wellness initiatives, ensuring that our programs are sensitive to diverse student experiences.
Build Capacity

2.5   Review existing student services policies, processes, practices and procedures that may unintentionally discriminate, and revise policies through an EDIA lens.
- Develop new policies and procedures, including: Leave of Absence Policy, Return to Campus Following Hospitalization or Emergency Transport procedures, Accommodations Policy for Episodic and Non-Permanent Injury or Illness, and Death of a Student.
Build Capacity

2.6   Increase and enhance supports available on-campus to help students impacted by racism (e.g., culturally-relevant, trauma-informed mental health counselling services, healing circles, educational programs). Special consideration should be given to those with intersecting identities (e.g., with differing sexual orientation and gender identities).
- Explain counselling and health services intake processes with greater clarity.
- Make information and resources about mental health easy to find, including one platform to learn about services and supports available on-campus and off-campus.
- Ensure healthcare practitioners can provide culturally-relevant, trauma-informed, and accessible services that are reflective of the diversity of students
- Review current service policies, practices and procedures through an anti-racist, culturally-relevant, accessible and trauma-informed lens.

- Consult Mi'kmaw, Indigenous and Black individuals, members of historically and currently excluded community, and other relevant groups on an ongoing basis. Apply their feedback to continue to improve on-campus supports and services.
  Build Capacity

2.7 Hire a Human Rights Education and Response Advocate (HRERA) position in the institution to advocate for students, faculty, and staff experiencing racism and support them in navigating reporting channels. Communicate clear pathways for how students can receive support and/or report incidents.
Build Capacity

2.8 Work with community members to develop informal resolution practices for individuals who do not wish to undergo formal reporting processes, which are inclusive of the cultures of historically and currently excluded communities. This may include those based on restorative justice principles, to address incidents of racism.
Build Capacity

2.9 Complete a needs assessment and recommendations for accessibility supports and services at StFX University, including services and supports available for students with temporary or episodic disabilities. Planning should include assessing staffing needs, funding structures, supervision, and accountability in relation to the goals outlined in the StFX Accessibility Plan, new provincial accessibility standards, and the vision of 'all students flourishing.'
Build Capacity

2.10   Implement a case management model to support students of concern. This may include students with mental illnesses or students who may be experiencing mental distress, who are in academic difficulty or may be heading toward or experiencing a crisis. Case Management supports students who have complex or multifaceted situations requiring a coordinated response.
Build Capacity

2.11   Provide proactive "care for the student caregivers" mental health supports debriefing for student peer support leaders who provide frontline and critical incident interventions to fellow students.
Build Capacity

2.12   Identify and streamline pathways to care to support early identification, self-care, and help-seeking by putting students in contact with the appropriate resources at the appropriate time. Make changes to how mental health services and supports are structured to match how students are accessing information and services. While the Health and Counselling Centre services meet or exceed industry standards for wait times, we recognize the need to look at alternate ways to increase access to services; streamline service pathways and follow-up for students, faculty and staff; and improve communications around resources and services. This initiative should include:
   • Expanding collaborative partnerships between StFX and health care agencies and community resources to systematize a coordinated approach to supporting wholistic student success and well-being.
   • Piloting mobile health unit to provide after-hours supports and services, in partnership with Nova Scotia Health.
   Build Capacity

2.13   Convene regular CARE Team meetings to formalize a coordinated, wrap around support model between faculty, academic units, and student services with systems and policies to facilitate communication and foster integrated and student-centric supports. The CARE Team responds to reports about students experiencing difficulties or whose behavior is raising concerns within the university community.
Build Connection

3. Foster Early and Ongoing Engagement with, and Recognition of, Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning

Goals:

- Facilitate guided learning opportunities for all students that proactively advance common learning goals across living and learning environments and years of study.

- Cultivate agency by engaging students in the process of discovering their strengths and personalized pathways to success. Provide students with learning that expands their adaptability for the future of work, skills that empower them to define their unique pathway for individual success and values that demonstrate social responsibility.

- Strengthen collaboration by leveraging internal and external partnerships – and ensuring ongoing communication and engagement – to create meaningful connections and increase access to the diversity of experiential and co-curricular learning opportunities available at StFX and in their local communities.

Initiatives:

3.1   Develop an integrated Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning Framework to scaffold intentional student learning and engagement opportunities through all programs and years of study.
Build Understanding

3.2   Review existing co-curricular programs, services and supports through an EDIA lens to meet the needs of both specific and broad intersectional student identities, including Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+, international students, graduate students, mature students, and students with disabilities
Build Understanding

3.3   In collaboration with Academic, Student Union and other campus providers, develop a digital Experiential Learning Catalogue/Co-Curricular Record (CCR) as a tool to help students thoughtfully select co-curricular engagement opportunities, integrate their campus experiences, communicate the development of skills, and reflect on their development in the areas of meaning and purpose.
Build Capacity

3.4   Strengthen off-campus student housing options, with a particular focus on facilitating off-campus accommodations for international students, in partnership with the Landlord's Association and Town of Antigonish. This could include support for initiatives such as education about tenant rights and responsibilities, promotion of off-campus housing options, income tax support, and At Home in Antigonish for the Holidays program.
Build Capacity

3.5   Develop targeted co-curricular programming and engagement opportunities for students with disabilities, with a focus on enhancing the first-year experience and experiential learning.
Build Capacity

3.6 Expand programming options for students with intellectual disabilities.
Build Capacity

3.7 Design, develop and implement regular and ongoing training on equity and anti-racism for all StFX students involved in leadership positions and peer support roles, varsity sport, learning abroad/exchange, etc. that they commit to, and enact, in their roles in our community. This training should:
- Be relevant to different roles, departments and settings with a consistent focus on teaching anti-racism and decolonization, anti-discrimination, cultural competency/safety, equity, gender-based and sexual violence, mental health literacy/anti-stigma, resiliency and coping skills, and accessibility.
- Capture StFX values and occur on an ongoing basis to incorporate changes to policies, practices, and procedures.
- Complement equity and accessibility training for faculty, staff, and instructors, to align with recommendations identified in the StFX Accessibility Plan and PACAR Action Plan.
Build Capacity

3.8 Increase the number of co-curricular engagement and paid employment opportunities available on-campus, with a particular focus on expanding employment opportunities for students from historically and currently excluded groups, including Mi'kmaw, Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+, international, first-generation students, and students with disabilities. This should include:
- Identifying, preventing and removing barriers to access current paid employment opportunities for students from historically and currently excluded groups, including paid internship and co-op placements.
Build Capacity

3.9 Commit to equitable and inclusive recruitment, hiring, onboarding, retention and offboarding practices that increase the diversity among our student staff complements, in particular representation from Mi'kmaw, Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+, international, first-generation students, and students with disabilities.
Build Capacity

3.10 Strengthen the capacity of on-campus and off-campus employers to create culturally-relevant, trauma-informed, accessible and supportive workplaces.
Build Capacity

3.11 Maintain the StFX Student Accessibility Advisory Committee to provide leadership opportunities for students with disabilities and ensure that their voices and lived experiences are reflected in program and service design, development and delivery.
*Build Connection*

3.12 Maintain ongoing partnerships between StFX Career Services and Tramble Centre for Accessible Learning to provide students with disabilities with access to career mentorship, workplace connections and employability. Increase student engagement in the Engage, Develop, Grow Your Employability (EDGE) Program, and assess the impacts of the program on students with disabilities.
Build Connection

3.13 Establish strategic partnerships and collaborations with the Town of Antigonish and County partners to create a welcoming, equitable and accessible community environment for all StFX students, with a particular focus on facilitating community engagement and connection for students from historically and currently excluded groups. This includes Mi'kmaw, Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+, international students, first generation students, and students with disabilities. This will involve collaborating on shared community projects, professional development, strengthening town-gown relations, an continuing to listen and learn from diverse student experiences.
Build Connection
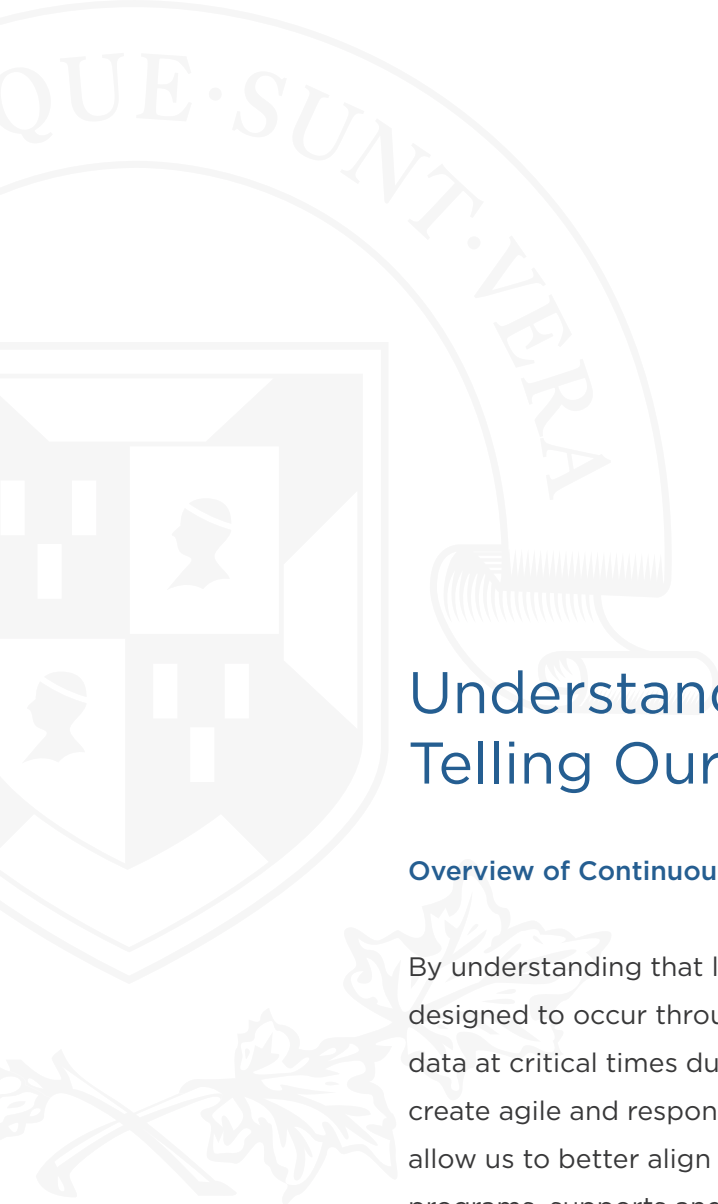
Understanding Our Impact.
Telling Our Story.

Overview of Continuous Improvement and Assessment Plan

By understanding that learning is: (1) a continuous process and (2) intentionally designed to occur through our immersive learning environment, we will capture data at critical times during the student lifecycle at StFX. This will allow us to create agile and responsive programming that meets the needs of students and allow us to better align the transferrable skills intentionally embedded across our programs, supports and services.

We have designed a Continuous Improvement Plan, that utilizes an assessment cycle and external program evaluation cycle that work on 3 (assessment) and 6 (external program evaluation) year time frames. The data gathered through both our assessment and external evaluation cycles will allow us to understand how our programs, resources and supports are leading students to achieve the learning outcomes we have mapped to all of our programming. We will also be able to monitor and evaluate what types of transferrable skills students are gaining and how these are correlated to their achievement of our defined learning outcomes.

Three-Year Assessment Cycle

The development of a three-year assessment cycle to inform the continuous assessment of all programs, resources and supports. By 2027, we will have assessed our signature programs and have continuous data about their effectiveness and impact on StFX students.

Six-Year External Evaluation Cycle

The implementation of a six-year external review cycle for all departments in Student Services using national/international standards to advance and innovate departmental operations. These developmental reviews will follow international standards, established by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) and the National Standard for Mental Health and Well-being for Post-Secondary Students. These standards will allow us to evaluate our departments using externally validated measures, and external review committees. These evaluations will be both internally and externally driven, increasing the robust data that we will acquire. The results of these evaluations will be used to innovate our programming and adjust when necessary, allow us to remain agile and proactive.

Three-Year Benchmarking Cycle

The identification and participation in key national/international benchmarking studies on a regular reporting cycle will allow us to track our relative process against peer institutions, in key areas including campus climate, sexual violence, health and wellness, student engagement and student success and well-being.

The **Canadian Campus Wellness Survey (CCWS)** is a Canadian Assessment Tool to help colleges and universities collect the data they need to support student health and well-being. CCWS helps post-secondary institutions better assess student health and well-being on campuses, identify priorities for intervention, and increase capacity to link research with policy and practice.

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) provides educators with an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending university. The survey asks students to report how much time and effort they give to empirically confirmed practices in undergraduate education. StFX participates in NSSE every three years, with the most recent data from 2020.

Canadian Post-Secondary Alcohol and Drug Survey (CPADS) contributes to Health Canada's substance use surveillance strategy, which provides the Government of Canada with vital information on the use of drugs and other substances by Canadians. Surveys like the CPADS provide governments and non-governmental organizations, including StFX, with valuable information that can inform policies and programs that support students' health and wellbeing.

The EAB Campus Climate Survey assesses students' perceptions of and experiences with diversity and inclusion and campus sexual violence. This is an essential benchmarking survey which will allow our portfolio to better understand if our collective efforts to produce programs and supports to utilize an intersectional lens have worked to shift StFX's student experience to be one shaped by equity and diversity.

Overview of Benchmarking

Following best practices in the field of Student Affairs, we will utilize bench-marking to understand how our programs, resources and supports are shaping the dynamics of students at StFX. These studies will allow us to understand how our programs are impacting the institution over time, and at the scale of the institution. Benchmarking studies are most powerful when paired with more nuanced evaluation processes such as Continuous Improvement and Assessment

because we can drill down into specific sub-populations and programs to understand if the impacts that we are seeing at the institutional level are correlated with programmatic level data. Benchmarking studies also allow us to compare StFX to similar institutions, both nationally and provincially.

Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

As an immediate next step towards implementation, an Accountability Framework for all initiatives identified in this Plan has been developed. For each initiative, a unit within StFX Student Services that will be responsible for its implementation; a metric or key performance indicator (KPI) to measure its progress; and activities that have occurred or are occurring in response to it.

Within the StFX Student Services portfolio, we will set and use KPIs at the department level as a measurement tool to ensure that:

1) The work of each department is connected to the strategic goals of the StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan
2) There is connection between the operations of each unit (within each department) to the strategic goals of the StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan
3) The goals and vision of the departments are tracked and most importantly achieved.

Cumulatively, the KPIs are one tool that allow us to understand and measure the collective success of our efforts. We will establish KPIs in order to understand the impacts we are making through our strategic initiatives:
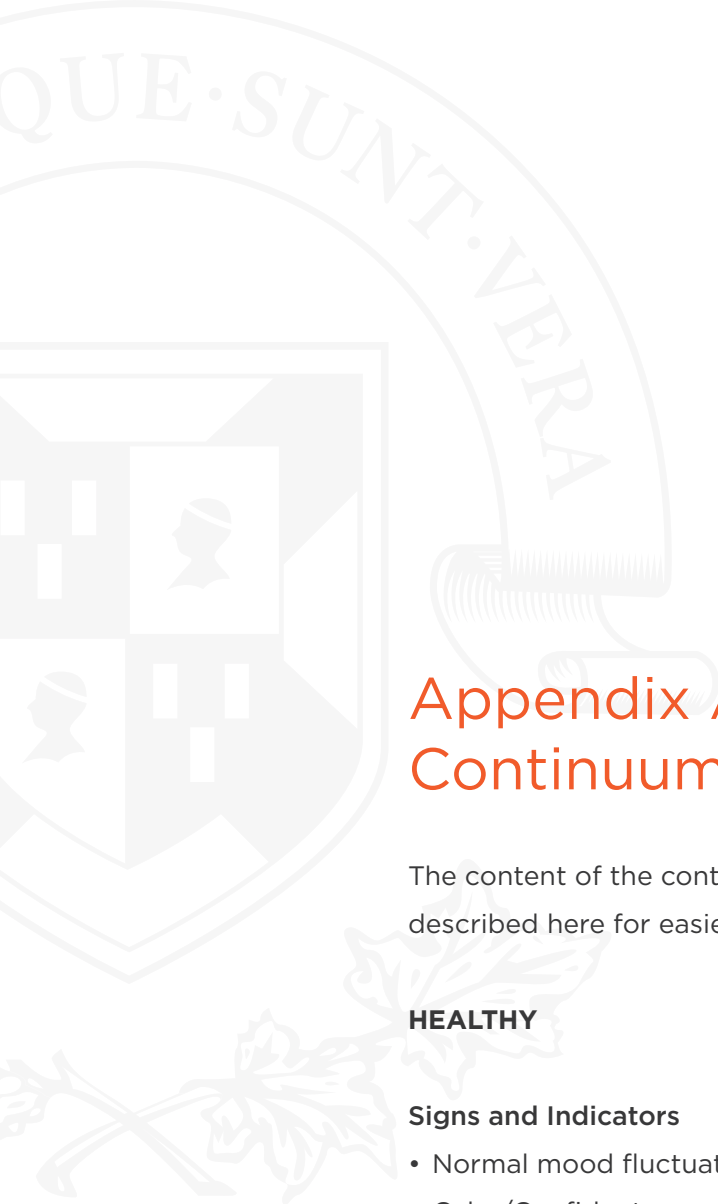
STRATEGIC INITIATIVE	SAMPLE KPIS
First Year Experience	• Number of faculty, staff, students who engage in EDI-A programming each year. Number of events held, and attendance at each event. • Number of students who have taken disclosure training, Positive Space Training, Sexual Violence Policy Training, Mental Health Literacy and Resilience Training etc. • Number of students completed intake assessment and development plan
Mental Health and Well-being	• Number of annual visits to Health & Counselling • Number of unique vs. recurring patients • Wait time from triage to first appointment • Number of times a student is referred by other units/departments and referred to community providers • Number of visits for physical health vs. mental health concerns • Percentage of students who access physical care/mental health care more than 6x/year
Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning	• Number of co-curricular EL experiences offered • Percentage of students who graduate with one or more WIL experiences • Number of students who participate in community-based volunteer opportunities. • Number of students using multiple EL services • Number of targeted employment opportunities for historically-excluded students • Total number of dollars available to hire students from historically-excluded groups for on-campus jobs. • Number of students from historically-excluded groups employed on campus.

Appendices

Appendix A: Plain Text Mental Health Continuum Content

The content of the continuum of care visual (found on page 13) is further described here for easier access to the information.

HEALTHY

Signs and Indicators
- Normal mood fluctuations
- Calm/Confident
- Good sense of humour
- Takes things in stride
- Can concentrate/focus
- Consistent performance
- Normal sleep patterns
- Energetic, physically well, stable weight
- Physically and socially active
- Performing well
- Limited alcohol consumption, no binge drinking
- Limited addictive behaviours
- No trouble/impact due to substance use

Actions to Take

- Focus on task at hand
- Break problems into manageable tasks
- Controlled, deep breathing
- Nurture a support system

REACTING

Signs and Indicators

- Nervousness, irritability
- Sadness, overwhelmed
- Displaced sarcasm
- Distracted, loss of focus
- Intrusive thoughts
- Trouble sleeping, low energy
- Changes in eating patters, some weight gain/loss
- Decreased social activity
- Procrastination
- Regular to frequent alcohol consumption, limited binge drinking
- Some to regular addictive behaviours
- Limited to some trouble/impact due to substance use

Actions to Take

- Recognize limits, take breaks
- Get enough rest, food, exercise
- Reduce barriers to help-seeking
- Identify and resolve problems early
- Example of personal accountability

INJURED

Signs and Indicators
- Anxiety, anger, pervasive sadness, hopelessness
- Negative attitude
- Recurrent intrusive thoughts/images
- Difficulty concentrating
- Restless, disturbed sleep
- Increased fatigue, aches and pain
- Fluctuations in weight
- Avoidance, tardiness, decreased performance
- Frequent alcohol consumption, binge drinking
- Struggle to control addictive behaviours
- Increase trouble/impact due to substance use

Actions to Take
- Follow care recommendations
- Seek consultation as needed
- Respect confidentiality
- Know resources and how to access them

ILL

Signs and Indicators
- Excessive anxiety, panic attacks, easily eraged, aggressive
- Depressed mood, numb
- Non compliant
- Cannot concentrate. loss of cognitive ability
- Suicidal thoughts/intent
- Cannot fall asleep/stay asleep
- Constant fatigue, illness
- Extrome weight fluctuations

- Withdrawl, absenteeism
- Can't perform duties
- Regular to frequent binge drinking.
- Addiction
- Significant trouble/impact due to substance use

Actions to Take
- Follow care recommendations
- Seek consultation as needed
- Respect confidentiality
- Know resources and how to access them

Appendix B: Plain Text StFX Continuum of Care Model

The content of the continuum of care visual (found on page 15) is further described here for easier access to the information.

PREVENTION

Universal
• Entire Student Population
• Extended Orientation Program
• Xaverian Community Foundations Online Modules

Selective
• Groups under threat
• Mentorship
• Residence Programs

Indicated
• Groups showing warning signs
• Early Identification System
• CAs (Community Advisors)

OUTREACH/ENGAGEMENT

- Flourish @ X
- Knowledge Keeper
- Residence Programs
- Visible @ X

RESPONSE

Advising
- Flourish @ X
- Knowledge Keeper
- Residence Programs
- Visible @ X

Developmental Mentorship
- Diversity Engagement Centre
- Accessible Learning
- RLC (Residence Education Coordinator)

Intermediate Care
- Short-term counselling
- Case management
- Group counselling

Specialist Supports
- Sexual Assault Care
- Culturally relevant supports
- Private therapy

Crisis Response

- Daytime crisis
- After hours assessment
- Hotline access

COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

- Continual connection with community supports