

7th Biennial National Summit for Building Healthy Academic Communities: Abstracts from the Poster Winners and Submitters

Wellness and well-being are not a nicety, they are necessary. The 7th Biennial National Summit for Building Healthy Academic Communities, held April 2025, brought together like-minded individuals to talk, listen, and build stronger and healthier academic communities through keynote speakers, plenary sessions, breakout sessions, wellness activities, networking activities, and poster sessions. The BHAC Journal is pleased to present the following abstracts from the poster winners and submitters.

More information about Building Healthy Academic Communities, future events, and how to get involved are available at: <https://www.healthyacademics.org/>.

Building a Thriving Academic Community: Wellness Initiatives in Action

Mary Ellen LaSala, PhD, RN
Stony Brook University

Amy Prokop, BA
Stony Brook University

Sylvia Wood, PhD, DNP, APRN, ANP-BC AOCNP®
Stony Brook University

Maria Milazzo, PhD, RN, CPNP-PC
Stony Brook University

Amanda Martocello, MLS
Stony Brook University

Angelea Laccasaglia, MSHRM, BS, MHFA-C
Stony Brook University

Valeria Digiovanni, MPS
Stony Brook University

Kathleen McCauley, BS
Stony Brook University

Outstanding Poster Award Winner

Background: Unhealthy campus work environments contribute to burnout and staffing shortages, which impact faculty, staff, and students. Research shows that thriving academic communities support the success and well-being of their members. In response to the AACN call to action, our dean launched a wellness collaborative to promote a healthy academic environment across six dimensions: environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational, physical, and social. Our initiative seeks to foster a culture of health and wellness for staff, faculty, and students throughout our School of Nursing (SON).

Methods: We developed a mission and vision aligned with our SON. The Critical Caring Theory guided our approach, focusing on interventions for a healthier way of being, knowing, choosing, and doing. We assessed needs using the Building Healthy Academic Communities toolkit and introduced expanded activities on Dean's Wellness Wednesdays. The Wellness Culture and Environment Support Scale survey informed targeted strategies. Located within an academic medical center, we connected with other health science schools to maximize collaboration and resources.

Results: To engage our community, we developed activities across dimensions, including intellectual ('Everybody's Work' screening/discussion), physical ('Walk with a Professor,' Yoga/Meditation), and social/ community building ('Acts of Kindness,' 'Pet Therapy'). Our initiative hosted 14 events, averaging 22 participants, with satisfaction scores averaging 4–5/5. Team-building activities helped break down silos and open channels of communication.

Implications: Our initiative involved assessing the academic community's needs, engaging participants through targeted activities, and leveraging existing programs. We recognized the need for hybrid, on-site, and virtual offerings to accommodate diverse groups and schedules. Challenges included coordinating around schedules, developing more individualized offerings, and budgeting. Our second-year actions aim to enhance further collaboration and a sense of connectedness in the SON community. Activity offerings will expand to include financial wellness. We will draw on insights from post-activity evaluations to refine future programming.

Take Home Message: The Wellness Collaborative group gained valuable insights throughout this project. Post-activity evaluations proved essential, offering feedback to refine programming and better address community wellness needs. Survey results highlighted the need to expand our focus by incorporating environmental and financial wellness into targeted initiatives. Moving forward, we aim to strengthen stakeholder collaboration, fostering a deeper sense of connection within the SON community. While committed to an ambitious vision, we recognize key challenges, including time constraints for committee members, scheduling and coordination of wellness activities, personalization of offerings, and establishing a well-defined budget for approval. By addressing these obstacles strategically, we hope to continue a sustainable and impactful wellness program that benefits our community long-term. Our approach will remain flexible, ensuring we adapt to evolving needs and continue promoting holistic well-being through thoughtful, inclusive initiatives.

Author Correspondence:

Mary Ellen LaSala, PhD, RN

maryellen.lasala@stonybrook.edu

Ergonomics Assessment to Meet the Needs of Employees' Health and Wellness: Take Home Message

Ashley East, MS
Western Kentucky University

Ashlee Greenidge, BS Student
Western Kentucky University

Outstanding Poster Award Winner

Findings: This project identified significant ergonomic risks within College of Health and Human Services (CHHS) workstations at Western Kentucky University (WKU), with an average office station assessment score of 5.71, indicating high potential for musculoskeletal disorders. The most critical issue was inadequate seating, which contributed to frequent discomfort in the neck, lower back, and hips. Nearly all participants reported pain at least once in the past week.

Take Home Message: The key takeaway is that targeted ergonomic improvements, especially proper seating and posture, can drastically enhance employee comfort and productivity. Immediate steps include distributing educational materials to assess and correct current workstation set ups, implementing ergonomic training, and promoting movement breaks. Longer-term strategies involve investing in ergonomic chairs, standing desks, and professional consultations. Addressing these risks now not only supports staff well-being but also sets a proactive standard for ergonomic design in future workstation set ups.

Address author correspondence to:

Ashley East

ashley.east607@topper.wku.edu

Creating a Culture of Well-Being for Nursing Students Through a Serenity Room

Jennifer S. Graber, EdD, APRN, PMHCNS-BC
University of Delaware

Jennifer Saylor, PhD, APRN, ACNS-BC
University of Delaware

Isabella Leonardo, BSN Student
University of Delaware

Elizabeth Speakman, EdD, RN, FNAP, ANEF, FAAN
University of Delaware

Background: Stress is a major factor in the nursing profession today as the hospital population, academic environment, and nursing student issues are more complex leading to job related stress, including overload and burnout. Everyone experiences stress in some form causing physical, emotional, or behavioral problems. As nurses, we are excellent caregivers towards others but often disregard our own health. The lack of healthy behaviors and personal self-care can lead to physical illness, including sleep deprivation and fatigue, and emotional distress and mental health issues. Continuous work pressure and stress may ultimately result in issues with mental health and unhealthy behaviors leading many to search for a proper work-life balance and overall well-being in the academic environment.

Methods: Based on best practices, we designed a room with calming-colored walls, massage chairs and other comfortable furniture, a water feature, and soft music along with oil diffusers. Students in the School of Nursing were invited to use the room and were asked to take several small surveys to state how they felt before and after being in the room.

Results: Overall, participants rated the room as a positive experience. Most of the respondents stated that the massage chair was their “favorite” activity but also enjoyed having a space to just sit and relax for a few minutes where nobody would bother them.

Implications: To effectively manage stress and incorporate healthy lifestyle behaviors to maintain mental health, one must first understand personal adaptability and reactions in stressful situations. The mental health of nurses is more important now than ever and needs to be addressed not only in the home environment, but also in the academic environment.

Take Home Message: Stress and mental well-being continue to be a significant concern in the nursing profession today. This is compounded by increasingly complex challenges faced by today’s nursing students. To address this, a wellness initiative grounded in evidence-based practices was implemented by designing a dedicated serenity room featuring calming wall colors, massage chairs, a water feature, soft music, and essential oil diffusers. Students within the School of Nursing were invited to utilize the room at their leisure. Participants were asked to complete brief pre- and post-experience surveys to assess changes in their stress levels and overall well-being. The majority of respondents reported a positive experience, with the massage chairs noted as a favorite feature while also valuing having a quiet,

uninterrupted space to pause and recharge. Nurses must learn early on to engage in self-care and the mental health and well-being of nurses must be prioritized. Initiatives like this provide a model for fostering resilience, reducing burnout, and promoting a culture of wellness in nursing education.

Address author correspondence to:

Jennifer Graber, EdD, APRN, PMHCNS-BC

jgraber@udel.edu

Fostering Resilience in Nursing Students: A Holistic Peer-led Study Session Program

Terri Peerenboom, MA, MSN, APRN, PMHNP-BC
Sam Houston State University

Background: Sam Houston State University's School of Nursing (SHSU) implemented a bi-weekly Peer-Led Study Session (PLSS) program in Spring 2019 to enhance academic performance and resiliency.

Methods: After facing challenges with commercial platforms, the Success and Wellness program developed a customized resilience-building approach featuring bi-weekly, 30-minute sessions led by trained Peer Mentors. Program effectiveness was measured using the Student Nurse Stress Index (i.e., SNSI) and brief COPE questionnaire.

Results: Participants showed decreased use of maladaptive and avoidant-focused coping strategies, increased use of most problem-focused strategies compared to non-participants, and notably lower stress levels by semester's end.

Implications: The program effectively promotes adaptive coping mechanisms through supportive peer relationships and targeted resilience-building activities.

Take Home Message: This holistic approach addresses burnout prevention in nursing education, potentially improving future patient care and job satisfaction.

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Address author correspondence to:

Terri Peerenboom, MA, MSN, APRN, PMHNP-BC

tlp052@shsu.edu