



# Transforming Online Education:

Cultivating Equity,  
Wellness, and  
Empowering Learners



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# • Who We Are

## **Megan VanBuskirk**

- Director of Quality Assurance at Excelsior University
- Doctoral student at Johns Hopkins University.
- Professional Development Lead of the QM IDA
- QM Peer Reviewer, APPQMR Facilitator, and Coordinator.
- Research goals - social justice within online ed design and facilitation.



## **Roxanna Medeiros, PhD Researcher**

- Program Director of Health & Wellness at Maharishi International University
- Program Director of MIU Online
- QM standards advocate
- QM PRC course participant
- Harvard Grad Student



## **Michele Jersak**

- Counselor at Century College
- Higher education veteran of 25 years.
- Doctoral student in Physiology and Health at Maharishi International University.
- Online instructor and learning advocate at Century since 2008.



## 2. The Humanitarian & Wellbeing Deficit

- Social media and technology booms
- Worldwide COVID-19 pandemic
- Mental health pandemic



# CHLOE 8 Report

**Figure 28 – Chief Online Officer responses to the development of Student Services initiatives at their institution:**

- Only 9% of community-building initiatives “fully developed”
- 21% – other student support
- 34% – mental health support



# Community & Mental Health Services



The deficit is not just in higher online education, but across communities.

- Rise in mental health needs
- Community staffing issues
- Lack of access (insurance, location)



# Student Dissatisfaction

Lack of mindfulness | Lack of student support | Issues with overwhelm | Issues with prioritization |  
Frustration with mental health | Dissatisfaction with academic performance

# 3. Design Models & Methods

01

Design Best Practices + Wellness Domains

Mixed Methods + Control + Blind

02

03

Academic Performance & Multitudes of Wellness

Social Responsibility & Tools

04



# Curriculum Infusion

## DOMAINS OF WELLNESS

- PHYSICAL
- INTELLECTUAL
- EMOTIONAL
- SOCIAL
- SPIRITUAL
- ENVIRONMENTAL
- OCCUPATIONAL

## QM STANDARDS

- COURSE OVERVIEW & INTRODUCTION
- LEARNING OBJECTIVES (COMPETENCIES)
- ASSESSMENT AND MEASUREMENT
- INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS
- LEARNING ACTIVITIES & LEARNER INTERACTION
- COURSE TECHNOLOGY
- LEARNER SUPPORT
- ACCESSIBILITY & USABILITY



4. Century College

# Century Methodology

01

Megan & Roxanna's Model & Templates

Mixed Methods + Control + Unblinded

02

03

Academic Performance & Multitudes of Wellness

Faculty Qualitative Data

04

# Century Champions

## Robert Jersak

- Communication Studies Faculty at Century College
- Instructor for the Minnesota State college and university system for over 15 years.
- Areas of interest – cross-cultural empathy, deliberative dialogue and audio documentary interviewing.



## Yanmei Jiang

- English and Gender Studies at Century College
- Former instructor at Shanghai International Studies University
- Passionate advocate for student success
- Supporter of equity, OERs, and targeted support



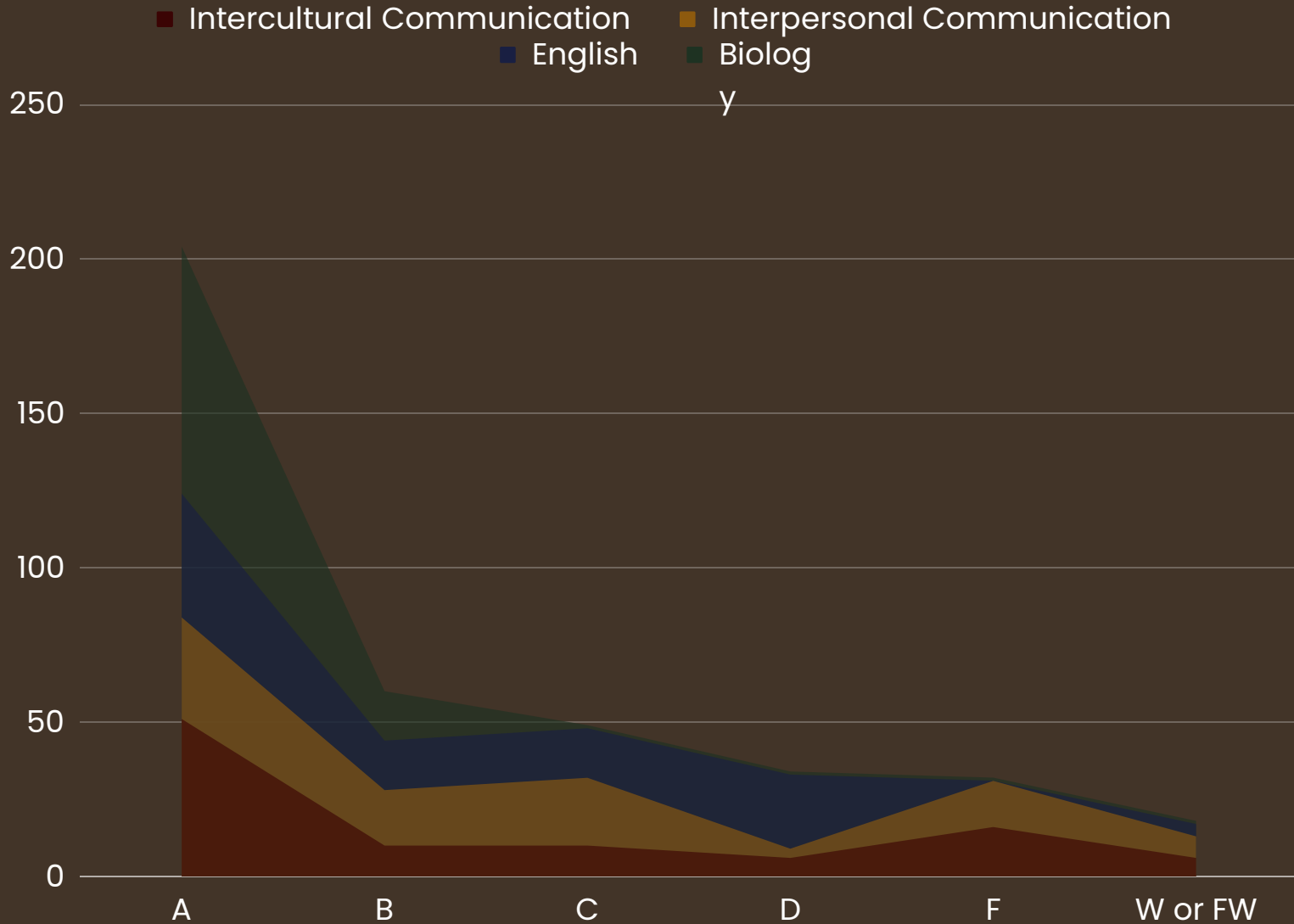
## Rahul Kane

- “Distinguished Educator of the Year”
- Biology instructor at Century College
- Bachelors and Masters degrees in various science subjects
- Doctoral degree in Instructional Technology Education
- QM Peer Reviewer
- STEM Grant Writer
- Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society Representative.



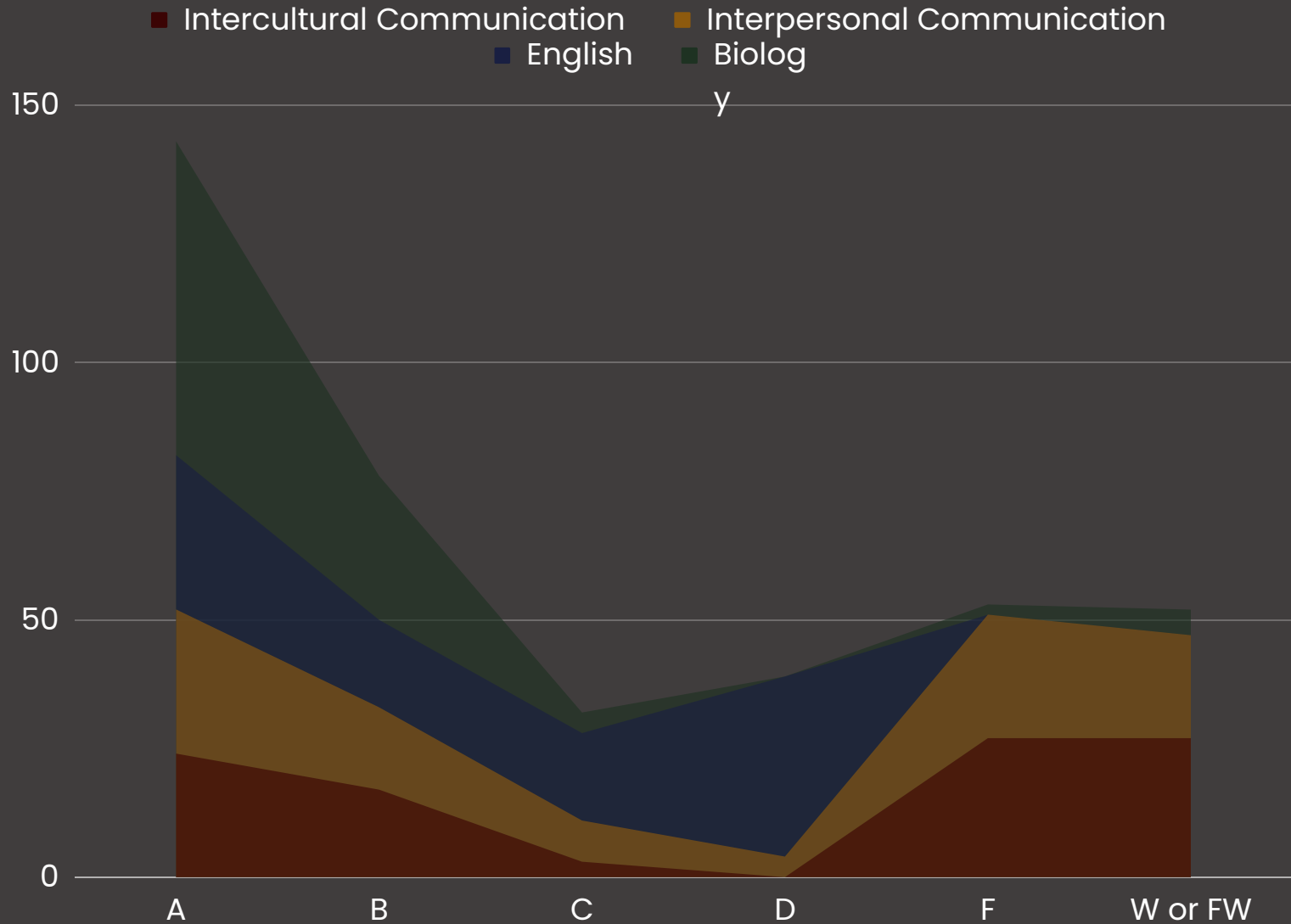
# Quantitative Data Overview

DISCIPLINE COMPARISON - EXPERIMENTAL



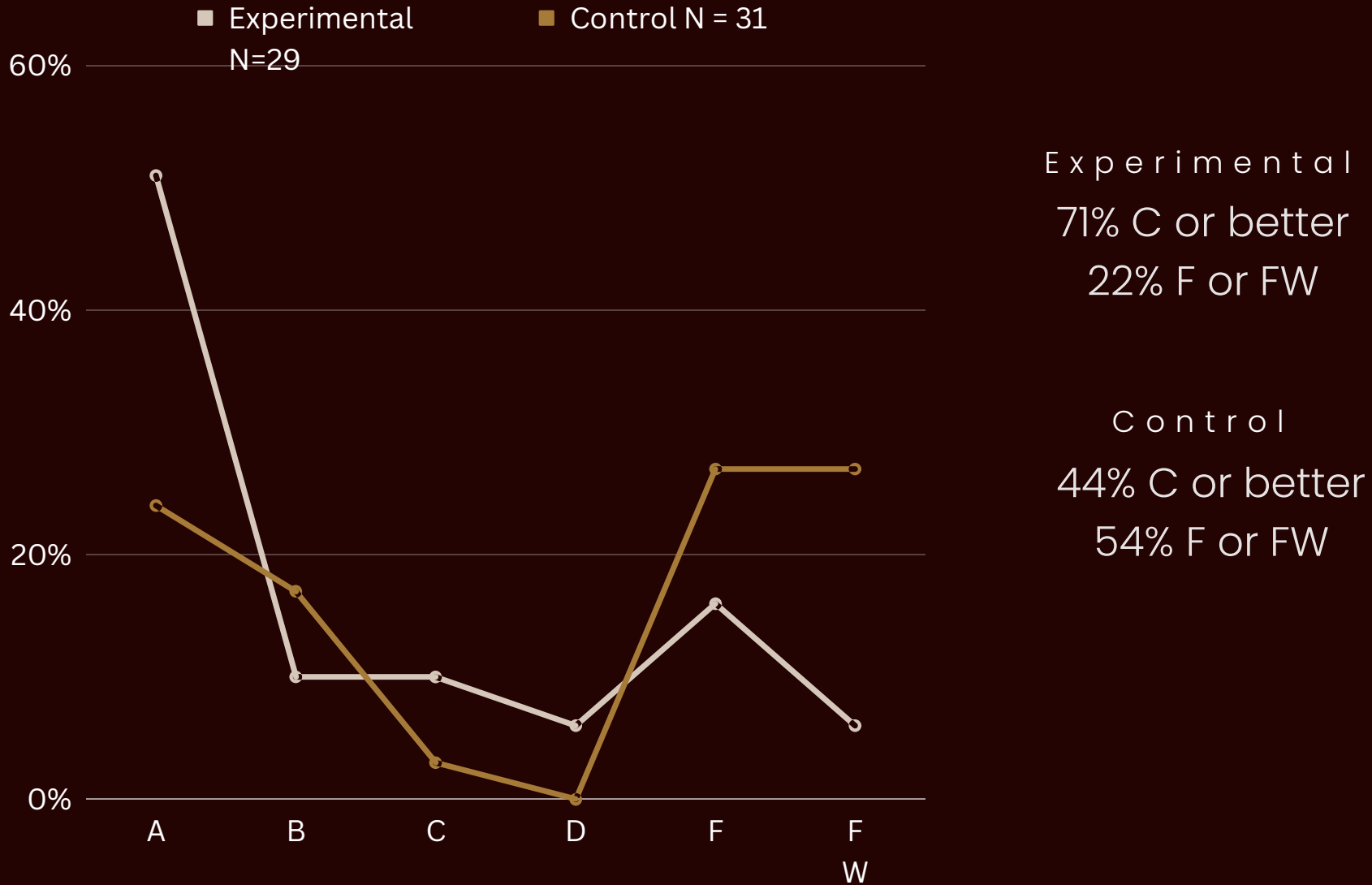
# Quantitative Data Overview

DISCIPLINE COMPARISON - CONTROL



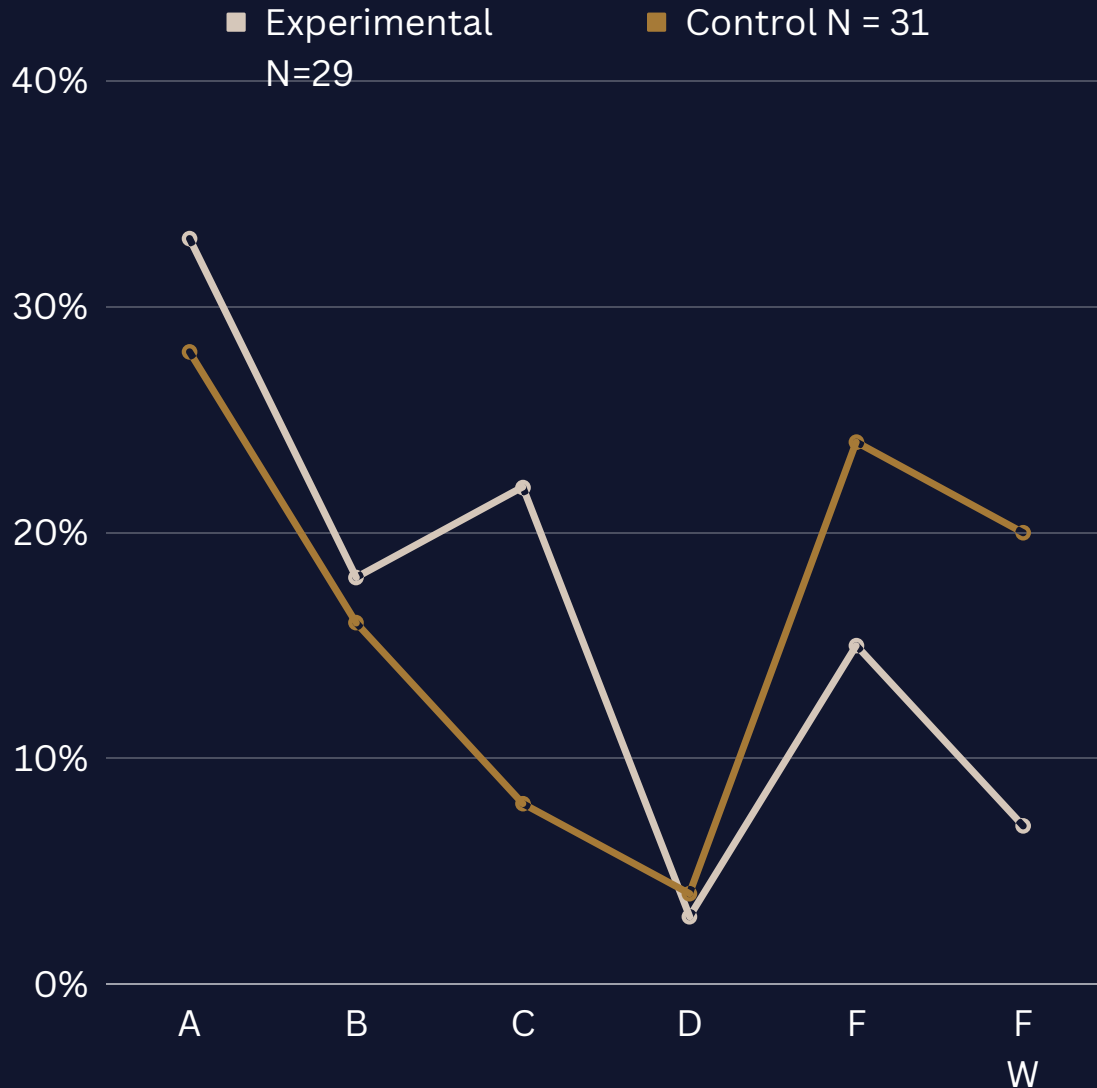
# Course Completion & Success

I N T E R C U L T U R A L C O M M U N I C A T I O N



# Course Completion & Success

I N T E R P E R S O N A L C O M M U N I C A T I O N



Experimental

73% C or better

22% F or FW

Control

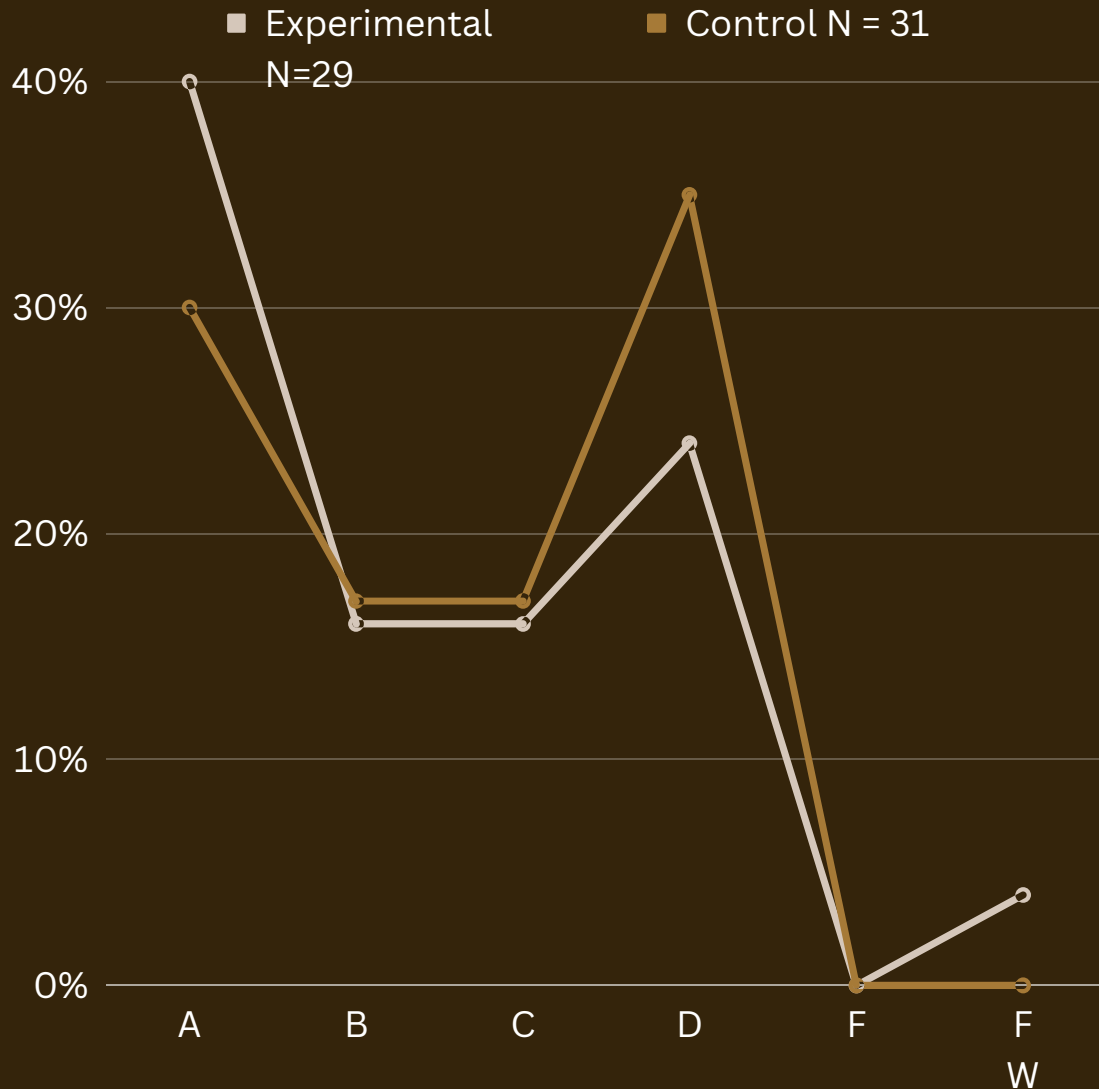
52% C or better

44% F or FW



# Course Completion & Success

E N G L I S H



Experimental

72% C or better

28% D, F, or W

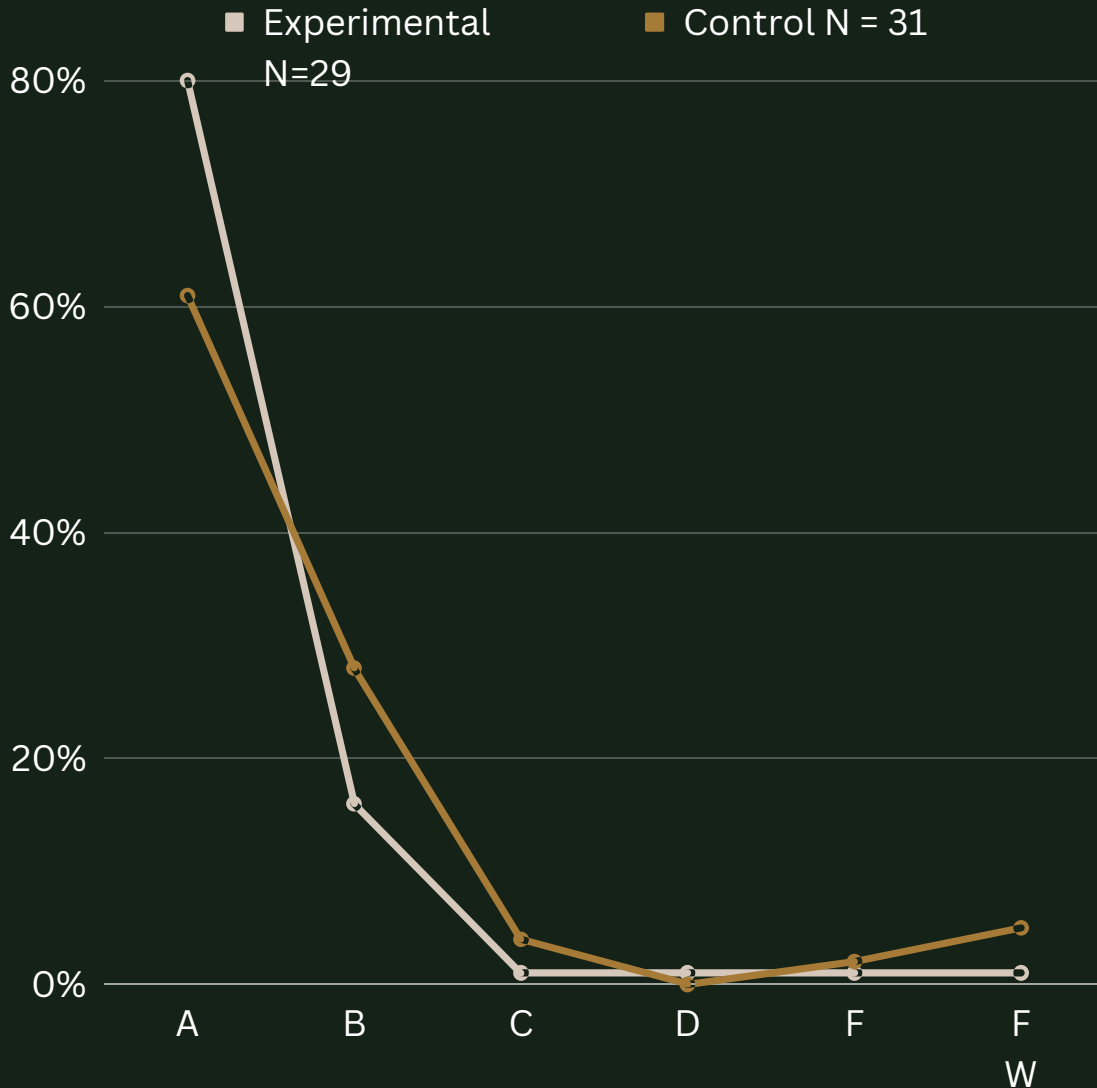
Control

64% C or better

35% D, F, or W

# Course Completion & Success

B I O L O G Y



Experimental  
97% C or better  
3% D, F, or W

Control  
93% C or  
better  
7% D, F, or W

# Faculty Experiences



## ROBERT JERSAK, COMMUNICATIONS

- Enhanced participation and engagement
- Higher learner investment and empowerment
- Robert also used the resources for life balance
- A great reminder for learner and faculty self-care



## YANMEI JIANG, ENGLISH COMPOSITION

- Nonacademic support resources increased preservation
- Three students considered dropping but used support resources and were retained.
- Improved sleep habits
- Mental health support during family divorce



## RAHUL KANE, BIOLOGY

- Rahul used resources to care for his mother during a medical emergency
- Rahul used resources to support his mental health
- Rahul and his learners shared experiences during the semester regarding the support resources

# Learner Testimonials



## Focus & Concentration

- "Feeling more peace and ready to **get a lot of stuff done.**"
- "...**more focused** on my assignment."
- "...**refreshed** and able to **concentrate** better."
- "**more focused**; more **clear**; more **energetic**; feeling **refreshed.**"
- "...an understanding of the coursework **without difficulty** and confusion."



## Relaxation & Reduced Anxiety

- "...more **calm**, rested and **refreshed, re-energized.**"
- "...reduces my **anxiety**; less **anxious**; less **stressed**; **peace**; **relief** and **happiness.**"
- "...**relaxed** and motivated to enjoy my day after practicing a type of meditation."
- "...lowers **stress** getting things off my chest."



## Awareness & Affective Regulation

- "I was able to **slow down** and think of how I was feeling."
- "...more **grounded**"
- "...very **relaxing**, more relaxed and **in tune** with my actions and emotions."
- "...a **release** in all aspects"
- "After practicing breathwork, I can **control my emotions** better."

A photograph of a man in a library aisle, reaching for a book on a high shelf. The shelves are filled with books, and the lighting is warm and focused on the man. The background is slightly blurred, emphasizing the man and the books he is reaching for.

## 5. Study Results

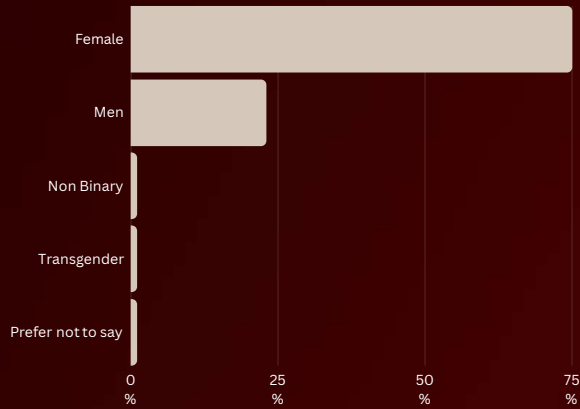
# Who Are Our Students?

What does the data tell us about our online student demographic profiles?

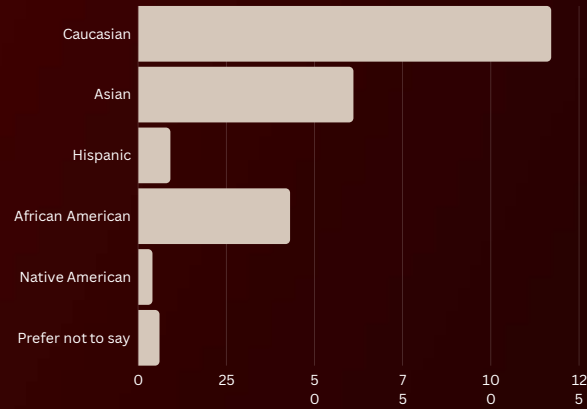


Leveraging what we know about our students' world beyond academia to support the prioritization of their personal goals and learner success.

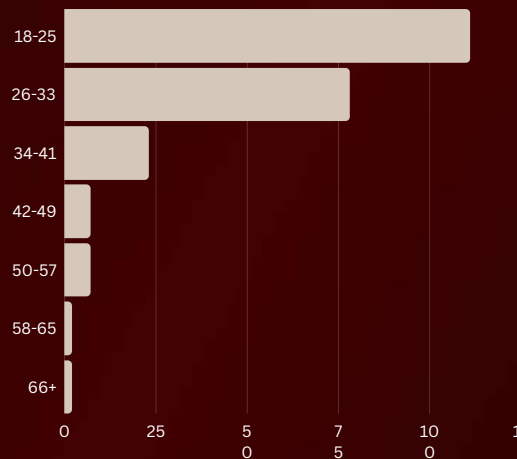
# Demographic Findings



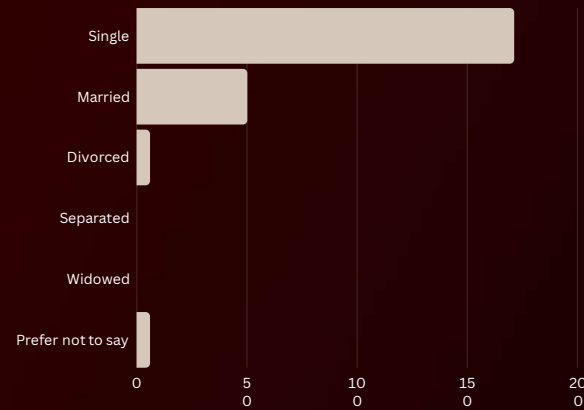
PRIMARYLY FEMALE



PRIMARYLY CAUCASIAN

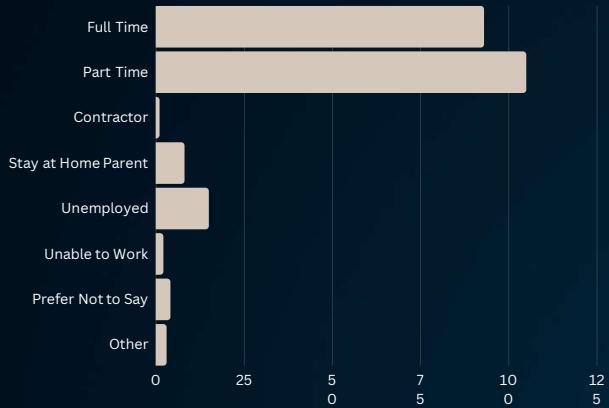


UNDER 35

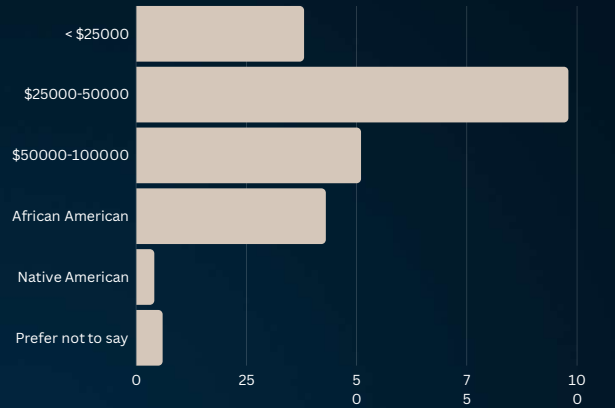


PREDOMINATELY SINGLE

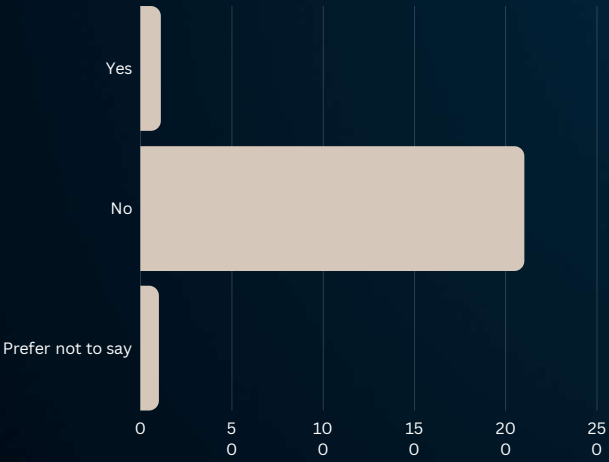
# Demographic Findings



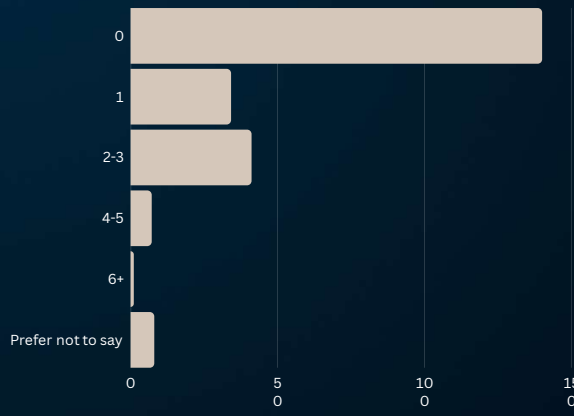
EMPLOYMENT STATUS



HOUSEHOLD INCOME



DISABILITY



DEPENDENTS



# Quantifying Domains of Wellness in Online Education



## SAFE HAVEN

Over 1/4 of learners were not connecting to core spiritual beliefs or spending time in a safe haven or comfortable space to them.



## EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Additionally, while learners may spend time keeping up their academics and general safety and cleanliness, their own inner work and emotional health seemed to suffer.

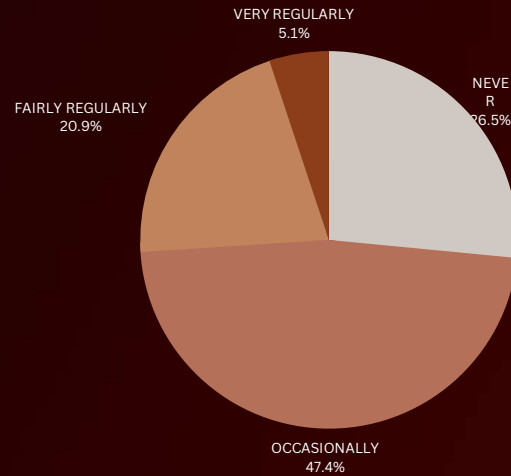


## PRIORITIZATION

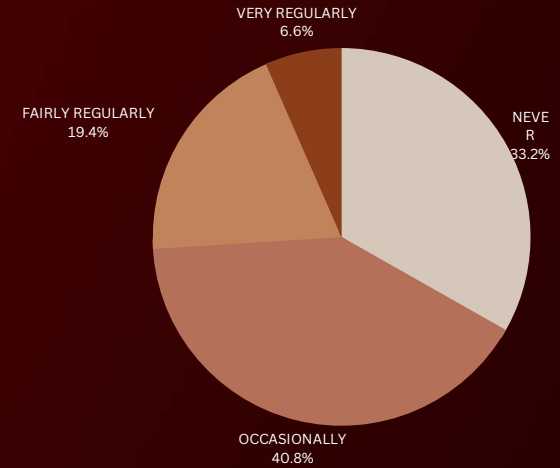
Learners are trying to put their emotional health and wellness at the forefront; therefore, we need to nurture that simultaneous gap and need.

# Domains of Wellness in Design

## PHYSICAL WELLNESS

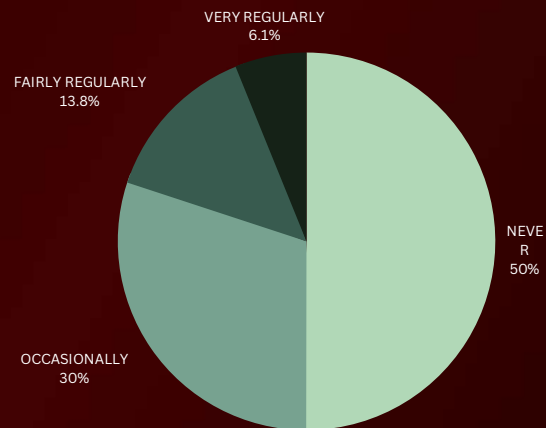


PHYSICAL WELLNESS & COPING



PHYSICAL WELLNESS & SEEKING STRESS RELIEF

## INTELLECTUAL WELLNESS



CONTEMPLATIVE & CREATIVE PRACTICES

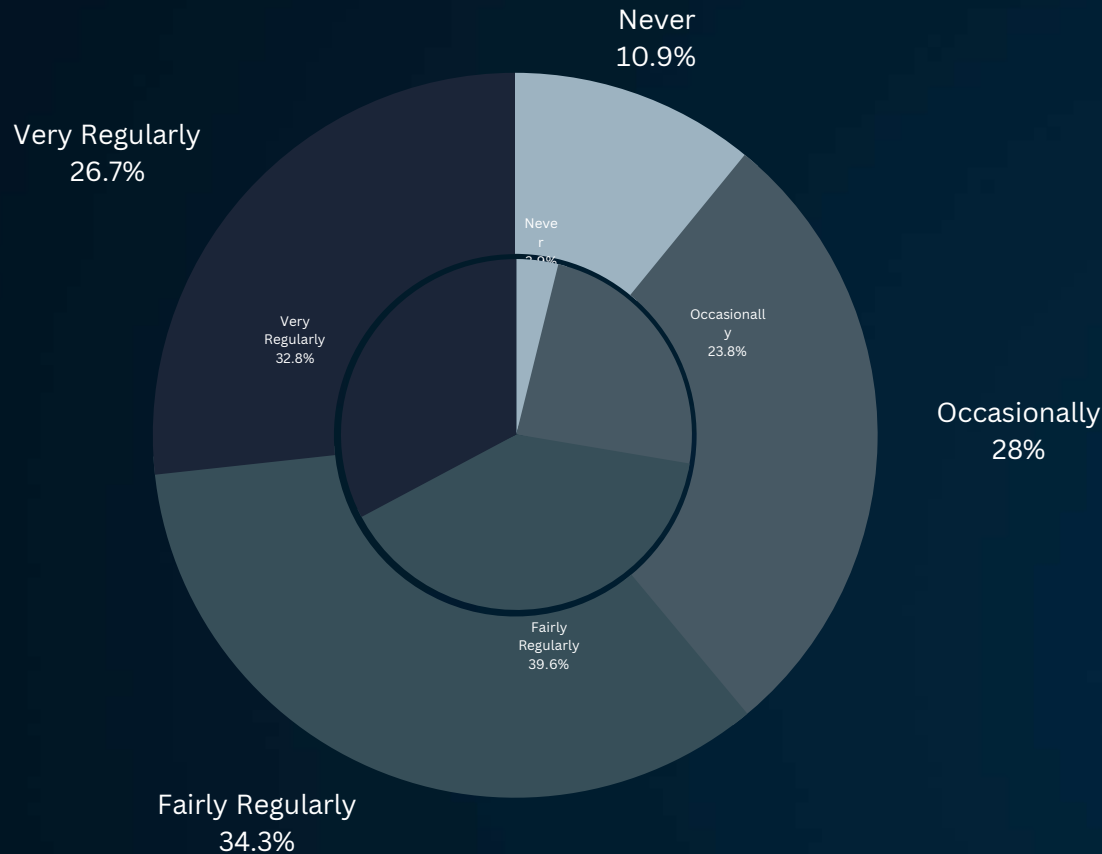
# 10,000 Ft. View



From a broad view, occupational and social wellness are healthier on average than the other domains, which shows that learners are prioritizing work and those resulting social relationships over their own physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

# Social & Occupational Wellness

## An Intrinsic Bond



### SOCIAL WELLNESS

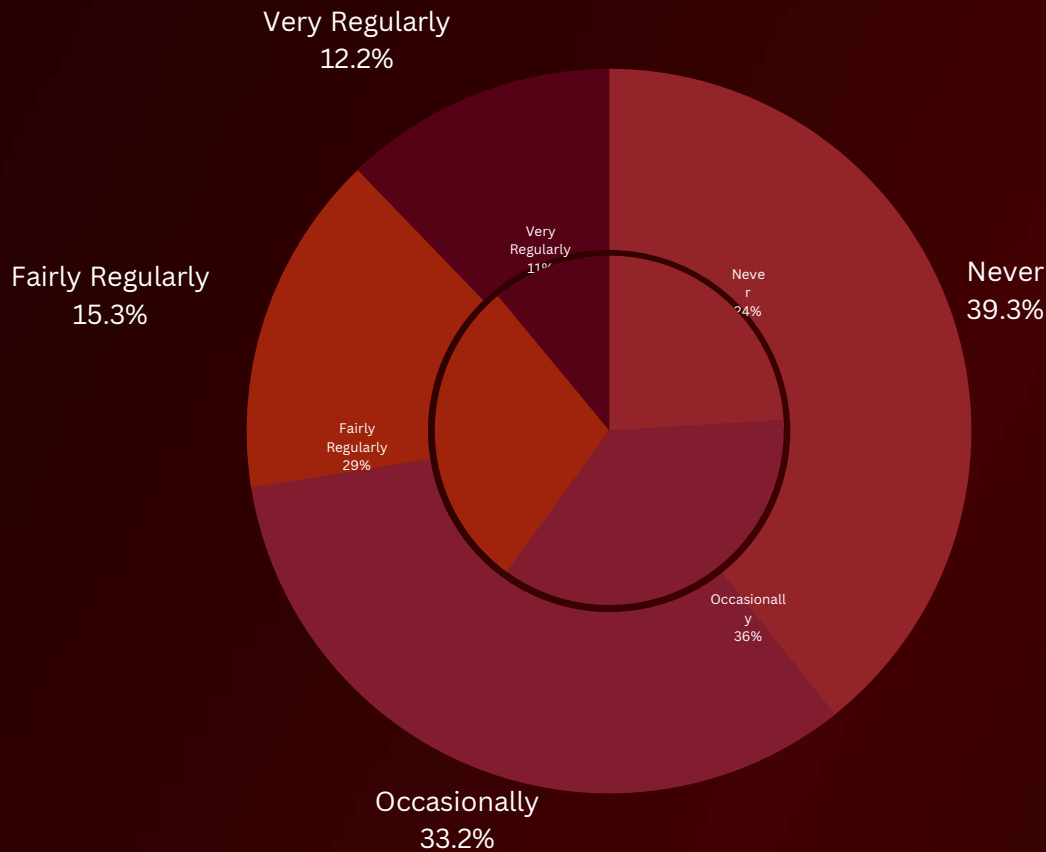
Students display attentive behavior in Communication, Social Commitments & Accountability

### OCCUPATIONAL WELLNESS

These data also reveal a level of commitment to the relationships with colleagues and employers and highlights the emphasis students place on workplace collaboration.

# Social & Occupational Wellness

## Challenges Students Face



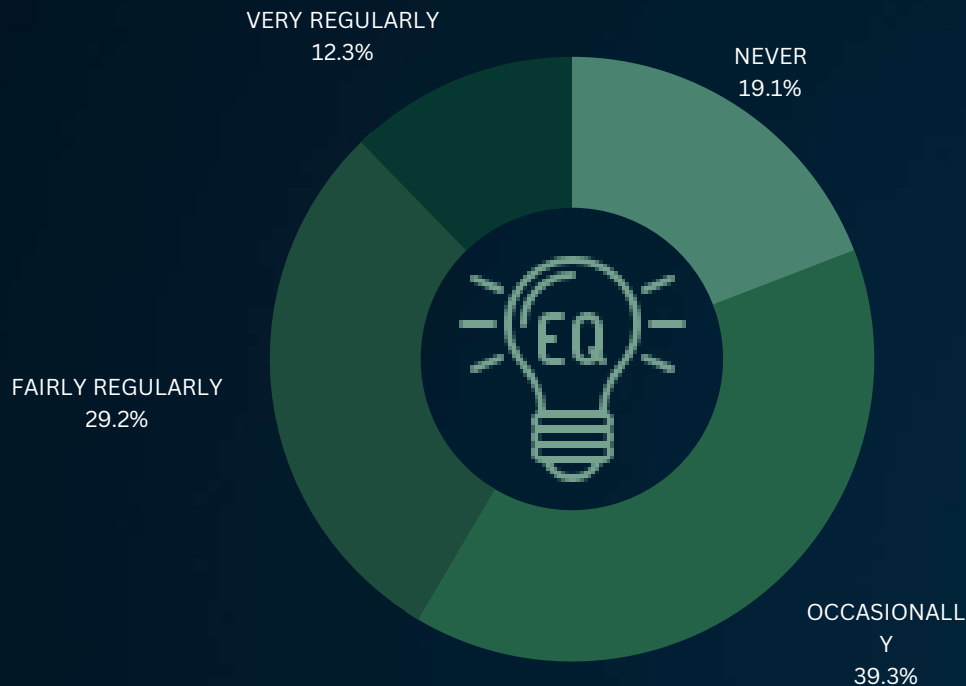
### OVERWORKED

In terms of work-life balance, 24% of students feel they are never able to avoid overburden, while 36% only occasionally do so.

### LACK OF MENTORSHIP

Mentors, life coaches, and occupational connections can provide crucial support to students based on the data. These support systems play a critical role in enhancing students' academic and career journeys, aligning with their goals, and ensuring holistic well-being.

# Emotional Wellness & Learner Experience



## COPING & GRIEVING

Students' responses to coping and grieving practices show that 19.1% never appropriately grieved, and 39.3% did so only occasionally. These statistics are relevant when considering the significance of emotions in their studies, which has been well outlined by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence.

# Managing Overwhelm



## Resilience

Roughly 30% to 60% of learners reported a sense of academic burden to the extent that they harbored doubts about their capacity to surmount these challenges.



## Stress & Anxiety

In the context of stress and anxiety, over 85% of learners indicated they were experiencing stress and nervousness.



## Difficulty Coping

Over half of learners responded that they had difficulty coping with life and its demands.

# Learner Habits



## Self-Care

Initial results show that beyond basic hydration, nourishment, and doctor's appointments, learners are not taking additional steps to reduce stress.

## Humor

It also seems that learners try to find positivity particularly through humor, which could inform design.



## Design

Perhaps, then, courses should be designed with more nourishment and with humour in mind to bring levity and build trust while offering support.



# 6. Action Plan

This study revealed that learners needed guidance into certain domains of wellness. We wanted to embed such content.

## KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Wellness & Demographic Integration
- Non-Academic Support Emphasis
- Focus on Women with Low Socioeconomic Status
- Specific Needs Address
- Mentorship & Support Priority
- Coping Strategies Integration
- Empowerment Objectives



# 7. Future Directions

## Learners As Multi-Faceted Individuals



*Learners are more than their education. Behind the learner is a person with a multitude of needs that must be nurtured.*



## Cross-Institutional Collaboration

Cross-institutional collaboration with non-academic student support departments to create more student resource courses and wellness check-ins to create a connected and supportive online learner community is necessary.

# 8. Open Dialogue

- What challenges are you currently facing?
- How can you incorporate similar strategies or promote cross-institutional initiatives that go beyond the scope of learner academics and promote equity and holism?
- Are demographics currently informing your instructional design? How?



# THANK YOU!

