

# GLOBAL STUDENT WELL-BEING SUMMIT 2025



## CO-CREATING STUDENT WELL-BEING STRATEGIES FROM THE STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

E: [HlopheCN@ufs.ac.za](mailto:HlopheCN@ufs.ac.za) | E: [gswsummit@ufs.ac.za](mailto:gswsummit@ufs.ac.za) | [www.ufs.ac.za](http://www.ufs.ac.za)

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VISION **130**  
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UNIVERSITY OF THE  
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UFS  
STUDENT AFFAIRS  
STUDENTESAKE  
DITABA TSA BATHUTI

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## INTRODUCTION

The student well-being summit is the second edition of a pilot summit conceptualised by the University of the Free State (UFS), Stellenbosch University (SUN) and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) in 2024. In 2024, the summit was only open to five (5) universities and three (3) TVET colleges as a pilot. In 2025, the summit strives to broaden the conversation to include more national and international institutions including TVET colleges in the summit. For the inaugural pilot summit, only five universities and three TVET colleges participated. In 2025, the summit strives to broaden the conversation to include more national and international institutions, inclusive of TVET colleges.

The terms ‘well-being’ and ‘wellness’ are frequently used interchangeably, and both of these terms are often associated with narrow visions of physical health or ‘self-care’. However, it is important to consider well-being as a holistic process, which the individual has to participate in actively.

The well-being of students in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is no longer negotiable, considering the alarming rates of suicides, attempted suicides, gender-based violence (GBV), dropouts, and overall safety concerns created by the expansion of HEIs (including off-campus accommodation etc.). There is an increasing call for institutional cultures to be reshaped to create a student-centred higher education system. Therefore, institutions must rethink the way in which they conduct their usual business (Universities South Africa, 2023).

## BACKGROUND

There is a growing consensus that HEIs need to do more than merely emphasise academic achievement in isolation. It is necessary to ensure that students develop holistically, and that they are equipped to manage the pressures of higher education, their planned careers and life in the modern world (Douwes et al., 2022). This in turn carries the potential of increasing academic performance among students, as they would be better equipped to pursue their academic goals. Continuing the feedback loop, this academic success can in turn contribute to the student’s future well-being. The necessity of encouraging this feedback loop is highlighted by the finding that South African university students’ well-being has been decreasing in recent years (Eloff & Graham, 2020).

As mentioned by Sinsi (2024) ‘South Africa, with a suicide rate of 23.5 per 100 000 people, ranks third worst on the continent. In South Africa, for instance, suicide has been rated as the fourth leading cause of death among people aged 15 to 24, reflecting the devastating mental health toll on young people.’ The awareness of this issue is reflected in the introduction of this document, where the high rate of suicide attempts (completed and attempted), GBV and high dropout rates are highlighted (Mashishi, 2021, Van der Merwe, 2019). Additionally, the concerns regarding the high rate of substance use and discrimination against minorities in South Africa should be highlighted (Da Luz Scherf, 2024, Muller & Daskilewicz, 2018).

*From the above, it is clear that it is of the utmost importance for HEIs to take an active role in supporting students.*

In recognition of this, numerous conferences have been held around the world to discuss the topic of student well-being. This topic appears to be gaining more attention, as evidenced by the increase in the number of conferences held to address this area. Eleven conferences outside of Africa have already discussed the topic of student well-being. Themes identified from previous conferences tend to centre around the broadly defined concept of ‘mental health’, with emphasis being placed on ‘whole campus models’ and ‘well-being integrated learning’. Thus, the trend is toward considering well-being practices as something that should be adopted at the campus or university level, rather than leaving it up to individual programmes.

Additionally, there is particular emphasis being placed on integrating well-being into the curriculum as a means to reach more students. Additional themes that begin to emerge are the use of technology to ensure student well-being, and ways of helping students manage uncertainty. These conferences have also highlighted the need to involve staff and students in developing programmes aimed at ensuring student well-being. However, only three of these conferences have emphasised student attendance/participation, namely the EUniWell Symposium: Good Practices on Student Well-being in Netherlands, HEA Wellbeing Conference – ‘Supporting Success through Wellbeing in Higher Education’ in Ireland, Inter-Institutional Student Well-Being Summit in South Africa events (European University for Well-Being, n.d., Higher Education Authority, n.d., Fredericks & Boyce, 2024).

*From the above, it can be deduced that student involvement in the conferences relating to student well-being is still an uncommon occurrence.*





## PURPOSE

The purpose of the student well-being summit is to involve students in programmes that are developed especially for them, to enhance their well-being. The participation of the individual promotes holistic well-being, and this summit is therefore founded on this principle.

## SUMMIT OBJECTIVES

The well-being summit aims to:

- Engage students in a courageous conversation regarding their well-being (all-encompassing physical, mental, emotional and social well-being).
- Address risky behaviours such as substance abuse, which are a hindrance to well-being and act as drivers for sexual and gender-based violence.
- Engage students on intersectional issues concerning culture, gender, disability and inclusivity.
- Highlight aspects that promote a sense of belonging and safety, and address the factors that create feelings of isolation.

## DETAILS OF THE SUMMIT

UFS will be hosting the Global Student Well-being Summit from 11-13 September 2025 in the Callie Human Hall on the university's Bloemfontein campus. The main target reach is set at 500 students and 100 staff members. Below is a breakdown of the targeted institutions as well as the respective target number of students and staff:

- UFS students, capped at a total of 200 for all three campuses.
- Other South African university students, capped at eight students per institution.
- Students from international institutions, capped at five students per institution.
- Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges, capped at five students per institution.

## WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

Any student or staff member from a higher education institution may participate in the Global Student Well-being Summit 2025. The following people and institutional bodies will also be represented.

### SUPPORTING SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION ORGANISATIONS

- Southern African Association for Counselling and Development in Higher Education (SAACDHE)
- South African Association of Campus Health Services (SAACHS)
- University Sports South Africa (USSA)
- Higher Education Disability Services Association (HEDSA)
- National Association for Student Development Professionals (NASDEV)
- Higher Health
- South African Association of Senior Student Affairs Professionals (SAASSAP)
- Association of College and University Housing Officer – South Africa Chapter (ACUHO-i-SAC)
- United Nations Association of South Africa (UNASA) UFS Chapter

## VALUE PROPOSITION

Each participating institution will receive a report that will reflect the data collected, the depths of discussions, and recommendations from students concerning their well-being. This report will assist institutional support services to review their current services and programs.





PROGRAMME

DAY 1: 16 JULY 2025

TIME	ITEM	PERSON
08:00 – 09:30	Registration	
09:30 – 09:50	Opening & Welcome	Temba Hlasho, EDSA
09:50 – 10:00	Entertainment	
10:00 – 10:50	Plenary Session: Healthy Masculinity	Mandla Simelane, South African UN Ambassdor
10:50 – 11:00	Introduction of Key Note Speaker	Programme Director
11:00 – 12:00	Keynote Speaker: Student Well-being as the Cornerstone of Student Centredness	Prof Hester Klopper, VCP
12:00 – 12:15	Body Break	
12:15 – 13:00	Plenary Session: Financial Literacy Skills with ABSA	ABSA
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch	
14:00 – 15:00	<b>Breakaways</b>  Returning strong! (facilitated by CTL) African spirituality (facilitated by H&W) Transactional sex (facilitated by GEADO) Food insecurity (facilitated by Student Life) Living and learning environments (facilitated by HRA) Leadership skills are not just for leaders (facilitated by SGO) The impact of stigma and discrimination (facilitated by CUADS) Risky behaviours in relation to SGBV (facilitated by Higher Health) The struggles of minority groups in higher education (facilitated by an external person TBC) Digital well-being (facilitated by Prof Noxolo Gcaza NMU)  <i>*Staff members will have separate breakaways with institutional units*</i>	
15:00 – 16:00	Plenary Feedback & Departure	Programme Director
16:00 – 16:30	Surveys & Closure of Day 1	Programme Director

DAY 2: 17 JULY 2025

TIME	ITEM	PERSON
09:00 – 09:10	Opening & Welcome	Facilitator
09:10 – 10:00	Plenary Session: Lived Experiences of Students with Disabilities	Martie Miranda Deputy Director: CUADS and Nobomi Duma (student), University of the Free State
10:00 – 11:00	<b>Breakaways</b>  Bullying and cyber safety (facilitated by Student Life) Sports in relation to development (facilitated by KovieSport) Self-confidence/resilience (facilitated by H&W) What does a healthy campus look like? (facilitated by H&W) Sense of belonging (facilitated by Peer Mentorship Program) Ukuphefumlelana (facilitated by Mandla Simelane) Substance abuse (facilitated by H&W) Diversity and inclusion (facilitated by an external person TBC) Student entrepreneurship (facilitated by CFO) Sustainable ways of living – access programme (facilitated by Gernus Office)  <i>*Staff members will have separate breakaways with institutional units*</i>	ALL
11:00 – 12:00	Feedback to Plenary	Programme Director
12:00 – 13:00	Lunch	ALL
13:00 – 15:00	The Triathlon Challenge (relay format – teams of three)  <b>OR</b>  Aerobics Board Games Self-Dense Mediation Healing Through Art (Sip & Paint) Indigenous Games	KovieSport
15:00 – 16:00	Campus Tour	ALL
16:00 – 17:00	Break from Summit	
17:00 – 19:00	Movie Night	ALL

DAY 3: 18 JULY 2025

TIME	ITEM	PERSON
09:00 – 09:10	Opening & Welcome	Programme Director
09:10 – 10:00	Plenary Session: How do we better serve you?	Dr Munita Dunn-Coetzee, UFS Director: Student Health & Wellness
10:00 – 10:40	Plenary Session: Bullying & Cybersecurity	TBC
10:40 – 11:00	<b>Breakaways</b>  Reflections Conference Resolutions  <i>*Staff members will have separate breakaways with institutional units*</i>	
11:00 – 12:00	Feedback to Plenary	Programme Director
12:00 – 12:15	Closing Address	EDSA
12:15 – 12:20	Conference Picture	ALL
12:20	Lunch & Departure	



# ANNEXURE A

## DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING

Well-being as a concept has eight dimensions relating to different areas of functioning. To achieve holistic well-being, these intersecting components need to be collectively addressed (University of Maryland, 2017).



### PHYSICAL DIMENSION

The physical dimension of wellness encompasses the absence of illness, as well as a healthy, thriving lifestyle. These behaviours aim to ensure the continued physical health of the body through preventative behaviours such as the maintenance of a healthy diet and regular exercise. Additionally, this sphere includes the avoidance of potentially harmful behaviours such as substance use or risky sexual practices (University of Maryland, 2017).



### INTELLECTUAL DIMENSION

Intellectual wellness is ensured through participation in cognitively stimulating or creative pursuits. This is not limited to classrooms and study halls, however, as the maintenance of intellectual wellness comes from the free pursuit of one's curiosity, while also engaging in critical thinking (University of Maryland, 2017). This dimension can also be engaged with by sharing knowledge with others and seeking to master intellectual challenges (Stoewen, 2017). The process of ensuring intellectual wellness can potentially be further reinforced through activities such as learning to play an instrument or learning any other practical skill (Hornby, 2021).



### EMOTIONAL DIMENSION

The sphere of emotional well-being relates to the experience and management of emotions. This can involve self-care practices and the journey toward self-understanding (University of Maryland, 2017). The emotional dimension can also include an enthusiastic and positive orientation toward one's life (Stoewen, 2017). Maximising emotional wellness also enables the individual to maximise their ability to respond to stress and daily challenges (Travierso, n.d). This is however not an isolated process, as empathy and the fostering of emotional connections with others also falls under this dimension (University of Maryland, 2017). Emotional well-being allows the individual to utilise positive coping mechanisms and



### SOCIAL DIMENSION

Building on the previous dimension, social wellness encompasses active and meaningful connections with other individuals in one's community. While the individual's social and cultural background will influence the nature of these connections, it will always be important to maintain community links, and there may even be opportunities to forge links across these apparent divides (University of Maryland, 2017). Maintaining these social connections may ensure that the individual has support when they are facing challenges, and this may also present an opportunity to provide support to others (Hornby, 2021).



### SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

Spiritual well-being encourages one to seek answers to life's ultimate questions. It involves the search for meaning and seeking a sense of purpose. While this process may include overtly spiritual practices such as prayer or practices specific to individual religions, there is also the apparently universal search for a connection to something greater (University of Maryland, 2017). Engaging in spiritual practices can also incorporate physical activity, such as nature walks or yoga, or social practices, such as attending places of worship (Hornby, 2021). Through this process, individuals may gain the opportunity to develop a sense of harmony and compassion for all beings (University of Maryland, 2017).



### VOCATIONAL DIMENSION

The dimension of vocational wellness relates to career planning and engagement in one's chosen career. This is not merely a process of climbing the career ladder, but rather a pursuit of personal satisfaction and meaningful work. In order to ensure vocational wellness, the individual should strive to work in a manner that is consistent with their values and life goals, while also maintaining adequate work-life balance (University of Maryland, 2017). Through engagement in meaningful work, the individual may grow intellectually, while also sharing their skills and knowledge with others (Stoewen, 2017). It should further be noted that the vocational



dimension can also include volunteer work. Thus, it is not necessary to have a limited view of this domain, and there may be opportunities for individuals who do not always feel fulfilled in their work, or who are not yet employed to experience vocational wellness (Hornby, 2021).

### FINANCIAL DIMENSION

Financial well-being encompasses skills related to managing one's financial resources and one's relationship to money. Maintaining this sphere of wellness helps ensure that the individual has the resources they need to meet their short-term goals, while also preparing for the future (University of Maryland, 2017).

### ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION

Finally, environmental wellness encourages awareness of one's environment. This is frequently thought of as the natural environment, but it also includes the social environment and the built environment. This awareness fosters a connection to the environment, while also highlighting the impact that the individual has on the environment and vice versa. Through this awareness the individual can attempt to seek environments that ensure their well-being, while also seeking to protect supportive environments (University of Maryland, 2017). This may include involvement in volunteering projects, employment decisions, or simply living a more socially and environmentally conscious life (Traverso, n.d). Closer to home, this domain may also encourage the maintenance of a comfortable and organised living space, which can, in turn, contribute to overall well-being (Hornby, 2021).

### CONCLUSION

While these dimensions are listed as separate phenomena, it should be noted that they do intersect and can never be truly separated. And, although these dimensions may have complementary effects at times, they may also come into conflict. Thus, it is important that balance be emphasised whenever discussions take place in regard to these intersecting spheres. It should also be noted that the individual's situation, as well as their socio-cultural background will impact how these elements present. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to well-being – rather, well-being is a journey of an infinite number of intersecting paths that can be traversed collaboratively.





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