Focus on Students | Academic Years 2022 – 2030 | Executive Summary

The Georgia Institute of Technology has just completed the first year of implementation of Cultivate Well-Being – one of the six strategic focus areas for the 2020-2030 Institute Strategic Plan. During this time, the new division of Student Engagement and Well-being was established (combining the former divisions of Campus Services and of Student Life) and an inaugural Vice President was appointed August 1, 2021; both actions helped to solidify Georgia Tech's commitment to promoting student health and cultivating well-being. As it enters the second year of implementation, Georgia Tech intends revise and expand its intended strategies to better respond to what has been learned from student data and from student feedback.

Overall, the data from the Healthy Minds Study administered in Spring 2018 and Spring 2020 and the American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment given in Fall 2019 suggest that Georgia Tech students for the most part struggle and cope with health in ways that are similar to their national peers. There are instances where "red flags" are raised with regard to particular vulnerabilities or risks on the part of Georgia Tech, and there are also notable gender differences that need to be addressed. It should be anticipated that disaggregation of the data on the basis of other identities such as race/ethnicity will reveal health disparities and health equity gaps that require mindful, concerted attention. In addition, participant-observation throughout academic year 2021-22 yielded the following 10 themes:

- Theme 1: Broad Institute-wide awareness of the importance of cultivating well-being and clear commitment to this work, beginning at the very top.
- Theme 2: Prevailing misperception that Georgia Tech students have a greater incidence/prevalence of depression, suicide and mental health disorders compared to their peers at other institutions of higher learning.
- Theme 3: Unsupported belief that Georgia Tech has an insufficient number of mental health providers.
- Theme 4: Competent, caring, compassionate and committed health care providers across CARE, Counseling Center, Health Initiatives, and Stamps Health Services are underappreciated and not effectively leveraged.
- Theme 5: Disconnect between Institute messaging about advancing well-being and the lived experiences of students in both the curricular and co-curricular setting.
- Theme 6: High incidence of self-reported experiences and feelings of loneliness.
- Theme 7: Celebration of human doing-ness to the detriment of human being-ness.
- Theme 8: Conflation of crisis of any kind with the automatic need for clinical care, rather than greater discernment in self-assessment.

- Theme 9: Overemphasis of clinical interventions to respond to the student well-being challenge; under-reliance on prevention and health-/wellness-promotion frameworks and initiatives.
- Theme 10: Cultivate well-being strategic planning efforts need strengthening.

Before outlining the new plan, some key terms need to be defined. First, **health** is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."[i] The definition was refined in 1984 by WHO to include "the extent to which an individual or group is able to realize aspirations and satisfy needs and to change or cope with the environment."[ii]

Health cannot be fully understood without also considering the **social determinants of health**, which are defined by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP) in the US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) as "the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks."[iii] These determinants can be grouped as follows:

(1) economic stability;
(2) educational access and quality;
(3) health care access and quality;
(4) the neighborhood and built environment; and
(5) social and community context.

Georgia Tech is utilizing an eight-dimension model for wellness; below are brief definitions of each dimension adapted from work conducted by the Global Wellness Institute, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the University of Maryland at College Park:

- Emotional – Coping effectively with life stressors, having self-esteem, and expressing optimism, as well as being aware of our feelings, accepting the full range of feelings, expressing our feelings appropriately, and understanding the feelings of others;
- Environmental – Honoring the interdependent, dynamic relationship we have with our environment - whether social, natural, built or digital – and our responsibility for sustaining it; occupying pleasant, nurturing, safe and stimulating environments;
- Financial – Having basic needs met and a positive relationship with money, applying resource management skills to live within one's means, making informed financial decisions, setting realistic financial goals, and preparing for short- and long-term needs or emergencies;
- Intellectual – Finding ways to engage in lifelong learning, expand knowledge and skills, and interact with the world through problem-solving, experimentation and curiosity, as well as the ability to think critically, reason objectively and explore new ideas;
- Occupational (or career) – Getting personal satisfaction and enrichment from work, hobbies and volunteer efforts, that are consistent with one's values, goals and lifestyle, as well as taking a thoughtful and proactive approach to career planning and growth;

- <u>Physical</u> – Replenishing the body through physical activity, exercise, sleep, and nutrition; engaging in low-risk alcohol, tobacco and other drug use; conducting routine health exams/screenings; and adopting preventive measures such as vaccines and condom use;
- <u>Social</u> – Connecting and engaging with others and our communities in meaningful ways, having a well-developed support system, being interculturally competent, and feeling a sense of belonging; and
- <u>Spiritual</u> – Includes searching for and/or having a sense of purposeful existence and meaning in life, as well as seeking harmony with the universe, extending compassion towards others, practicing gratitude, and engaging in self-reflection.[iv, v, vi, vii]

Lastly, in defining well-being, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) states:

> "There is no consensus around a single definition of well-being, but there is general agreement that at minimum, well-being includes the presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, happiness), the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), satisfaction with life, fulfillment and positive functioning.[viii, ix, x, xi] In simple terms, well-being can be described as judging life positively and feeling good.[xii, xiii]

It is important to note that because well-being is subjective in nature, it is usually measured with instruments that rely on self-reports,[xiv] rather than the objective measures that may be used to assess or measure health and wellness outcomes. As such, like graduation, well-being cannot be directly impacted by any person, policy, or program. Rather, institutions of higher education can strive to impact and influence the context, climates, and correlates that are known to be associated with higher levels of well-being, but ultimately, the unique and complex array and interplay of conditions that contribute to well-being varies from student to student- and can also vary for any one individual throughout the course of their life. This aspect of well-being differs from health and wellness, where activities, interventions, policies, programs, and services designed purposefully – using available data and evidence - to shape individual- and community-level outcomes are more likely to result in a direct impact.

The Cultivate Well-Being Action & Transformation Roadmap identifies four priority goals, supported by 26 action strategies. Note that this Roadmap will focus on efforts to create conditions that promote and enhance well-being among students, with an emphasis on

reducing health and wellness disparities. A companion document that focuses on cultivating well-being for administrators, faculty and staff will follow later. The four "umbrella" goals are:

- Goal 1 – Cultural Change: Catalyze cultural, transformational change at Georgia Tech so that the places, practices, policies, protocols, people, and philosophies that have a demonstrated positive contribution to well-being for all students are adopted, advanced, expanded and/or strengthened, while those aspects of Institute culture that impede health and wellness are minimized. (Supported by nine action strategies)

- Goal 2 – Capacity and Creativity: Continue to improve the quality of and ease of access to equity-literate clinical care and intervention for students who need such services while also improving programs and services that focus on the primary prevention of health-related symptoms, diseases, and disorders; the promotion of wellness in a holistic manner; and the creation of conditions which cultivate and sustain well-being for all students, inclusive of all identities and backgrounds. (Supported by 11 action strategies)

- Goal 3 – Community and Connection: Increase, expand and generate broader awareness of and access to student engagement experiences across Georgia Tech that contribute to and facilitate the factors that comprise well-being, including sense of belonging and connection, happiness, resilience, self-awareness, and self-efficacy, as well as support living and leading in a manner that is consistent with one's personal values. (Supported by six action strategies)

- Goal 4 – Commitment and Continuity: Appoint an ad hoc study group comprised of a diverse range of Institute-wide constituents and representative of all Georgia Tech community stakeholders – including but not limited to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni – to review the feasibility of formally adopting (or adapting) the action framework for higher education that is outlined in the Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities & Colleges[xv] and subsequently incorporating the framework into Georgia Tech's ongoing administration, culture and operations for the foreseeable future, beginning no later than 2030 when the prevailing Institute Strategic Plan period is slated to end; make a recommendation to the President accordingly.

It is important to keep in mind that the desired outcomes identified in this plan are intended to span the remaining eight years of the Institute's strategic planning period ending in 2030, and initiation of the various strategies is staggered across multiple years (AY 2022-23, AY 2023-24 and AY 2024-25) in order to ensure the sustainability and viability of implementation efforts. As such, not all returns on investment will emerge immediately: some will necessarily coalesce more incrementally.

The goals and action strategies outlined in this Roadmap are based on a philosophical assumption that health, wellness, and well-being are the results of a complex, complicated and sometimes unpredictable interplay between numerous conditions and factors at the individual, community, organizational and societal levels. As a result, this Roadmap advances a cultural change model of change - one which necessarily requires the interest, investment, involvement, and innovation of all cabinet areas, colleges, divisions, and departments - or collective impact. Collective impact refers to "the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem." It recognizes that "…large-

scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations." [xvi] For Georgia Tech's leadership challenge in advancing health, wellness, and well-being, a collective impact framework (rather than an isolated/independent impact approach) is more appropriate and viable. The five conditions for collective success include (1) a common agenda and common understanding of the problem and the proposed solutions; (2) shared measurement systems and agreement on how success will be measured and reported; (3) mutually reinforcing activities, where each partner undertake specific initiatives in which they have expertise or strengths, and coordinates them with other partners; (4) continuous communication so as to build and sustain trust as well as enable accountability; and (5) a backbone support organization with dedicated staff separate from the participating divisions and departments who can coordinate structured decision-making processes, as well as plan, manage and support the initiatives through ongoing facilitation, logical and administrative support, and technical assistance.[xvii]

The Office of the Vice President for Student Engagement & Well-being, with support from the Institute via the strategic planning process, has committed to providing the backbone support organization for this Roadmap. Once the inaugural Director for Cultivate Well-Being Action and Transformation and the Assistant Director for Health & Wellness Outreach have been hired, Georgia Tech will move forward aggressively with implementation; for each action strategy, we will identify:
- A lead partner or point of coordination;
- A detailed outline for implementation, including milestones and a projected timeline (subject to revision as needed);
- Metrics for measuring success, including both quantitative and qualitative measures, as well as incorporating more <u>impact</u> measurements (not just <u>input</u> measurements) as part of the assessment; and
- Contingency measures for either pivoting or disinvesting in the event a particular action strategy is not yielding desired impacts.

The work of public health and social justice must necessarily be integrated, interdependent, and intersectional. Health cannot be advanced in the absence of justice, and essential indicators of justice are associated with well-being. As such, our work should be guided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's "Culture of Health Action Framework" which has a focus on equity: (1) Making health a shared value; (2) Fostering cross-sector collaboration to improve well-being; (3) Creating healthier, more equitable communities; and (4) Strengthening integration of health services and systems. [xviii]

Georgia Tech has the opportunity to become a national and global higher education leader in improving health, promoting wellness, and enhancing well-being for students. We employ some of the most talented scholars, researchers, and practitioners in the world; we enroll a student body that is deeply committed to activism and advocacy to improve quality of life for themselves, the surrounding metropolitan Atlanta area, and the global community; and we have a legacy of unquenchable optimism, tenacity and can-do attitude that paves the way for success.

Endnotes:

[i] World Health Organization. (1946, July 22). *Constitution of the World Health Organization*. Retrieved June 17, 2022, from https://apps.who.int/gb/bd/PDF/bd47/EN/constitution-en.pdf?ua=1. Accessed 1 July 2022.

[ii] Refer to World Health Organization (WHO) Definition of Health. Retrieved June 17, 2022, from https://www.publichealth.com.ng/world-health-organizationwho-definition-of-health/.

[iii] Refer to the Office of Disease Prevention & Health Promotion, US Department of Health & Human Services webpage on Healthy People 2030 at https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health.

[iv] This framework of wellness was adapted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) from the work of Swarbrick, M. (2006). *A Wellness Approach.* Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal, 29(4), 311–314. Additional information is available at SAMHSA's webpage at https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma16-4958.pdf and at https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma16-4955.pdf.

[v] Refer to the "8 Dimensions of Wellness" developed by the University of Maryland at College Park, University Health Center at https://health.umd.edu/hpws/dimensions.

[vi] Refer to the Global Wellness Institute webpage at https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/what-is-wellness/.

[vii] The "8 Dimensions of Wellness" graphic is adapted from the University of Wisconsin-Madison; their graphic can be found at https://fonddulac.extension.wisc.edu/implementing-the-8-dimensions-of-wellness/.

[viii] Frey, B.S. & Stutzer, A. (2002). Happiness and Economics. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, as cited by the CDC.

[ix] Andrews F.M. & Withey, S.B. (1976). Social Indicators of Well-Being. New York: Plenum Press, pp. 63–106, as cited by the CDC.

[x] Diener, E. (2000). *Subjective wellbeing: the science of happiness and a proposal for a national index*. American Psychologist, 55(1): 34–43, as cited by the CDC.

[xi] Ryff, C.D. & Keyes, C.L.M. (1995). *The structure of psychological well-being revisited*. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69(4): 719–727, as cited by the CDC.

[xii] Diener, E., Suh, E. & Oishi, S. (1997). *Recent findings on subjective well-being.* Indian Journal of Clinical Psychology, 24: 25–41, as cited by the CDC.

[xiii] Veenhoven, R. (2008). *Sociological theories of subjective well-being*. In Eid, M. & Larsen, R.J. (Eds)., The Science of Subjective Well-Being. New York: Guilford Press, pp. 44–61, as cited by the CDC.

[xiv] Larsen, R.J., Eid, M. & Diener, E. (2008). *The science of subjective well-being*. In Larsen, R.J. & Eid, M. (Eds.) The Science of Subjective Well-Being. New York: Guildford Press, pp. 1–12, as cited by the CDC.

[xv] The full text of the Okanagan Charter can be accessed at https://www.acha.org/documents/general/Okanagan_Charter_Oct_6_2015.pdf

[xvi] Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011, Winter). *Collective Impact*. Stanford Social Innovation Review, 9(1), 36–41. https://doi.org/10.48558/5900-KN19. Accessed 1 July 2022.

[xvii] Ibid.

[xviii] Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2018). *Moving Forward Together: An Update on Building and Measuring a Culture of Health*. https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2018/05/moving-foward-together--an-update-on-building-and-measuring-a-culture-of-health.html. Accessed 1 July 2022.