



The Global Wellness Institute (GWI) defines **wellness** as “the active pursuit of activities, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health.”<sup>1</sup> The GWI also notes that while wellness is an individual endeavor - wherein each person has personal responsibility for their respective choices, behaviors, and lifestyles - it can also be notably influenced by social determinants.

Individuals often confuse or use the words health, wellness, well-being, and happiness interchangeably. The GWI observes, “While there are common elements among them, wellness is distinguished by not referring to a static state of being (i.e., being happy, in good health, or a state of wellbeing). Rather, wellness is associated with an active process of being aware and making choices that lead toward an outcome of optimal holistic health and wellbeing.”<sup>2</sup>

Further, wellness is more than just about physical or mental health; it can incorporate anywhere from 6-12 interrelated and interdependent dimensions. Because it better reflects the holistic nature and complexity of students’ lives, Georgia Tech incorporates the eight-dimension model advanced by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in the US Department of Health & Human Services, which includes emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational (or career), physical, social, and spiritual dimensions.<sup>3</sup>

While there are varying ways to describe each dimension, below are brief definitions adapted from work conducted by the GWI, SAMHSA 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;

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to the Global Wellness Institute webpage at <https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/what-is-wellness/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> 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>.

- 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;
- Physical – 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;
- Social – 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
- Spiritual – 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.<sup>4, 5, 6, 7</sup>



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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> 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>.

<sup>6</sup> Refer to the Global Wellness Institute webpage at <https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/what-is-wellness/>.

<sup>7</sup> The “8 Dimensions of Wellness” graphic is from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and can be found at <https://fonddulac.extension.wisc.edu/implementing-the-8-dimensions-of-wellness/>.