UNIVERSITY LIFE
WORKPLACE
WELL-BEING
GUIDEBOOK
BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

During Spring 2022, a number of UL employees provided input on short and long-term well-being solutions. Many of those were implemented during the ’22 – ’23 academic year. We also collected feedback at the Fall 2022 UL All-Staff meeting on various aspects of our workplace, including well-being elements and employee engagement. This valuable feedback influenced the content of this guidebook.

This guidebook includes nine well-being elements that were adapted from research conducted by the Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) on key organizational factors for creating and sustaining a culture of health and well-being. A common definition is provided for each of these nine elements along with suggested strategies for implementation. Elements managed by UL Central will broadly impact all units. For example, while UL HR is responsible for creating a set of general interview questions connected to workplace well-being, units will select one or two questions to ask prospective candidates during an interview process.

The guidebook is divided into three parts:

1) A common division-wide element – Professional Development & Education
2) Unit and cabinet levels elements
3) UL Central elements.

Part One: Common, Division-Wide Element
Professional Development & Education

Part Two: Unit and Cabinet Levels
Shared Values and Language
Modeling Well-Being at All Levels
Rewards & Recognition
Traditions & Artifacts

Part Three: Central HR UL
Recruitment & Selection
Onboarding New Employees
Accountability & Performance Assessments
Policies & Procedures
The Division of University Life (UL) at George Mason University is committed to creating and sustaining workplaces where all employees can thrive, grow, and learn. Our goal is to use a systems approach in influencing our organizational culture while creating feedback mechanisms where we share best practices and adjust our approaches over time. In the UL strategic plan, we define well-being as, “Cultivating an environment of understanding and fulfillment of both individual and community well-being that promotes purpose, vitality, engagement, and resilience” (Revolutionizing the Student Experience, 2020-24). Our commitment to workplace well-being is both a self-care imperative and a we-care approach.

As a self-care imperative, we expect everyone to engage in practices and habits that can lead to optimal levels of well-being in all dimensions of our lives. All staff are encouraged to experiment with different practices and select the ones that work for you.

University Life leaders and supervisors are expected to create and sustain conditions that support employee well-being using a we-care approach. Our workplaces can be pathways for achieving goals that transcend our personal aims while also establishing high quality relationships, which are two critical drivers of overall well-being. Creating new policies and practices or modifying existing ones so that employees can lead purposeful and engaging lives is an example of a we-care approach.

The UL Workplace Well-Being Guidebook provides leaders, supervisors, and employees with suggested strategies and approaches designed to uplift employee well-being. Unit leaders, in collaboration with their employees, have the opportunity to create their own set of initiatives in each of the well-being elements outlined in this guidebook and using it as a springboard for generating new ideas and strategies that fit the context of any particular unit.

**SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION & PROCESSES**

All UL will engage in a common element that will be cross divisional in the 2023-24 academic year, which is Professional Development and Education. Activities will be integrated in division-wide meetings while unit leaders provide additional shared experiences for their teams.

In addition to Professional Development and Education, units and the cabinet will select one ADDITIONAL element to implement in 2023-24 from the following list:

1) Shared Values and Language
2) Modeling Well-Being at All Levels
3) Rewards & Recognition
4) Traditions & Artifacts
Unit leaders are encouraged to be innovative in designing initiatives aligned with unit goals and desired outcomes. Collaboration with team members and other unit leaders is encouraged in considering approaches and strategies that support employee well-being.

The following processes will be piloted from August 1, 2023 through May 30, 2024 as we collectively work to bring the elements in this guidebook alive across UL:

1) Unit leaders will select an additional element to implement along with the common element of Professional Development & Education. We encourage you to identify an element that could result in both immediate impact on employees and result in early successes or small wins.

2) Unit leaders will submit their workplace well-being plans to their respective cabinet member, who will review and approve those plans. A simple, brief well-being plan form/template will be provided.

3) An extended unit leader meeting will be scheduled in early Spring 2024 to share progress, best practices, lessons learned, and general feedback.

4) UL employees will have an opportunity to provide initial feedback at the Fall 2023 All Staff Meeting; other opportunities will be offered throughout the year with the goal of maintaining a continuous feedback loop.

5) The UL Workplace Well-Being Guidebook will be updated and revised based on feedback and new information.

6) Professional development will be provided to support UL leaders, supervisors, and employees.

7) Cabinet members will provide feedback to respective unit leaders; unit leaders will provide annual progress reports.

PART ONE: DIVISION-WIDE ELEMENT

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

Professional development and education is multi-faceted and should have a positive impact on the staff experience in University Life. Workplace well-being is one component of UL’s professional development and education offerings.
Likewise, well-being is multi-faceted with multiple components to define its effort and impact such as, career, social, emotional/psychological, purpose, community, etc. Staff can consider their own well-being needs, but also how they positively impact/contribute to the well-being of colleagues and teams.

**What Professional Development and Education Looks Like**

» Onboarding training progression to include well-being opportunities for new University Life staff within the first six months of employment.

» ACPA/NASPA and Mason have identified a competency area for “self-development” that can be used to designate and identify workplace well-being opportunities.

» Existing and emerging professional development programs, from various departments throughout the university, will be available to UL staff.

**Strategies for Implementation**

» Supervisors encourage staff members to include well-being goals in their professional development plan and have ongoing conversations with supervisees about their growth and learning.

» Employees take advantage of professional development opportunities around well-being. (e.g. trainings/workshops offered by the Center for Advancement of Well-Being, coaching through HR, Mason Rec classes)

» Whole teams engage in shared learning experiences that support overall well-being.

**PART TWO: UNIT AND CABINET LEVEL ELEMENTS**

**SHARED VALUES AND LANGUAGE**

The University Life core values of inclusion and equity, leadership for positive change, well-being, collaborative community, and strategic transformation are essential for achieving our vision of workplaces where everyone thrives. We communicate in ways with one another that inspire trust, respect, inclusion, and mattering.

**What Shared Values and Language Looks Like**

» Leaders, supervisors, and employees are creating a workplace culture which support the health and well-being of every UL employee
Shared division-wide values are integrated in our workplace and intentionally aligned with employee well-being goals

Our workplace well-being priorities are connected to increasing our impact on student success (putting our own oxygen masks on first to be in better service to our students)

**Suggested Strategies for Implementation**

Employees reconnect to our shared commitment to well-being as part of decision-making processes, for example:

- How will our decision impact student and employee well-being?
- What does your life look like when you’re at the pinnacle of your social well-being?

Employees are engaged in conversations about what most matters to them in their lives and in their work roles

Employees share stories about what it means to experience deeper meaning and connections in their lives through communications that sustain high quality relationships among peers and team members. Employees engage in the language of strengths as we value strengths-based workplaces and teams

**MODELING WELL-BEING AT ALL LEVELS**

University Life at all levels demonstrates an intrinsic commitment to well-being (theirs and others) through actions, decision making, and language with the goal of providing workplaces where everyone can be healthy, whole, and vital.

**What Modeling Well-Being Looks Like**

UL leaders at all levels understand why and how to support their employees in their personal well-being efforts creating and sustaining workplace cultures where everyone matters and can thrive.

- Cabinet, Unit Leaders, and employees (1) share a common commitment to well-being, (2) align formal and informal policies and procedures, (3) monitor and celebrate health and well-being, and (4) monitor and celebrate well-being efforts and successes

- Leaders and employees throughout the division intentionally adopt well-being practices and habits and regularly practice these behaviors in their leadership, setting the example for others in the unit or team
Leaders and employees initiate conversations at individual and team levels about the importance of engaging in practices that support employees’ well-being and overall health.

**Suggested Strategies for Implementation**

- Leaders and employees share their well-being goals and commitments with others and discuss progress.
- Leaders and employees find ways to engage in physical movement throughout the day (e.g. walking breaks, lunch away from workplace).
- Leaders must maintain healthy boundaries (e.g. don’t work while on leave unless extenuating circumstances).
- Leaders invite direct reports to create developmental plans that uniquely support their well-being; supervisors offer support by occasionally checking in on their progress.
- Supervisors have regular conversations about well-being with direct reports (once a month, etc.), signaling to employees that this is a shared expectation within the unit/team.

**REWARDS AND RECOGNITION**

Rewards and recognition are ways a culture reinforces desired behavior through tangible rewards and recognition. Rewards and recognition can be both intrinsic and extrinsic in nature.

**What Rewards and Recognition Look Like**

- Units incorporate frequent well-being recognition to increase team well-being.
- Nominate individual staff for well-being awards, UL and university recognition.
- Regularly recognize when people are engaged in well-being practices; create opportunities for peers to recognize each other in addition to employees’ supervisors.

**Suggested Strategies for Rewards and Recognition**

- Unit-level well-being recognition and/or annual awards, provide a meaningful well-being related reward.
- Use of Gallup Drops in Your Bucket cards, employees engage in Mason Chooses Kindness / Pats for Patriots and/or nominate a Kindness Ambassador as examples.
Allocate time in staff/team meetings for people to express appreciation for one another

TRADITIONS AND ARTIFACTS

A tradition is a recurring behavior or activity passed down within a group that has come to have special significance. An artifact is something tangible and often visible to which the group has assigned special meaning.

What Traditions and Artifacts Look Like

- Supervisors create time for employees to participate in and create traditions, which will increase the sense of belonging and values for tradition.
- Encourage units to create a well-being artifact that has meaning for their area(s)
- Annual events related to well-being (e.g., healthy cooking contests, etc.)

Suggested Strategies for Implementation

- Annual competition with another unit such as an engagement activity in BurnAlong
- Annual Mason Intentional Kindness or World Kindness Day activity at unit level [Lewis minor edit]
- Visual artifacts of Clifton Strengths profiles (team chart in a visible place, individual office door plates with top five strengths, etc.)
- Team participation on a Mason and/or UL service day

PART THREE: UL CENTRAL HR ELEMENTS

EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Recruitment and selection are important aspects of the employment process, particularly as it relates to staff transition, retention, and satisfaction. Research shows that prospective employees are deeply interested in the organization’s commitment to workplace well-being initiatives and employee well-being.

What Recruitment and Selection Looks Like

- Applicants learn about UL’s commitment to workplace well-being through language in job ads and job descriptions
- Candidates learn how well-being is embodied in UL during the interview process
Prospective employees recognize that well-being is valued and is a shared expectation and commitment across the division.

**Suggested Strategies for Implementation**

- University Life will develop a short statement describing the division’s commitment to workplace well-being that can be incorporated in job postings and recruitment efforts.

- Sample generic interview questions addressing workplace well-being are included in the existing UL HR recruitment resources.

- Candidates systemically learn about existing employee well-being initiatives at Mason and University Life, such as flexible work schedules, compressed schedules, hybrid work, CliftonStrengths, the Digital Resilience Badge, annual well-being goals and strategic initiatives and via materials such as workplace well-being guidebook.

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**ONBOARDING NEW EMPLOYEES**

New employees are introduced to UL’s workplace well-being commitment, initiatives and strategies early in their onboarding experience. UL HR and Unit leaders make new hires aware of expectations at the unit level along with resources that support learning and growth.

**What Onboarding New Employees Looks Like**

- New to UL team provides short component on UL workplace well-being commitment, initiatives and strategies (one page marketing piece for distribution). Attend and document one well-being program within the first 6 months of employment. This program can be sponsored by UL Professional Development, CWB, Mason HR or other units.

- Units will set shared goals (or review and update existing ones) addressing employee well-being, share with new staff and welcome their input.

**Suggested Strategies for Implementation**

- UL HR provides consistent information about UL’s commitment to employee well-being and division-wide expectations. New hires are informed about resources available for employees.

- Unit well-being efforts are planned during the first 3 months of a new employee’s start date (e.g., shared service/volunteerism, coffee chats, BurnAlong challenge, book club, staff team building activities, etc.).
Supervisors craft on-boarding training schedules that are sequentially ordered and balanced so employees do not become unnecessarily overwhelmed during the first weeks and months in a position.

Supervisors will have regular conversations with new employees about well-being, demonstrating that this is a shared expectation within the unit.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS

We define accountability as the practice of challenging ourselves and each other to commit to our self-care imperative and we-care approach across all well-being workplace elements.

What Accountability and Performance Assessments Look Like

UL employees are empowered to uphold and respectfully invoke the vision, mission, and values of this workplace guide.

UL employees recognize the importance of making a commitment to workplace well-being and demonstrate openness to constructive challenge in the spirit of upholding the ethos of our commitment to well-being.

Supervisors and employees engage in ongoing performance feedback conversations and hold each other accountable on performance updates outside and within the formal, annual review process.

Suggested Strategies for Implementation

Formal and informal performance assessments include an evaluation and discussion of an employee’s commitment to UL workplace well-being.

Supervisors provide timely, clear outcomes-driven performance management and goal setting practices that include well-being learning objectives.

Employees and leaders are trained to have effective accountability conversations (some examples include Crucial Conversations, validate and question/challenge method, etc.).

POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Policies are formal expectations, supported by clear processes that reinforce well-being in the workplace at the institutional and/or divisional levels. Practices are more informal, but generally adopted ways of operating that reinforce well-being in the workplace and may be institutional, divisional, unit-specific, or even collaboratively with another unit, team, or department.
What Policies and Practices Look Like

» University Life Flexwork Pilot

» Providing Spring Break flexibility

» Allowing flexible seasonal office hours (specific to units and based on peak program/service schedules, etc.)

» Paid FMLA (https://hr.gmu.edu/support-resources/parenting)

» Administering divisional temporary pay practices

» Establishing practices that encourage the use of earned leave

Suggested Strategies for Implementation

» Seeking feedback from others to enhance practices that increase team and individual well-being.

» Being aware of policies that reinforce well-being and how they interact with and impact the work environment and experience (e.g. Supporting policies that limit working while on leave, vacation, etc.)

» Rethink meeting norms when possible: For example, build in short breaks between meetings where possible. (e.g., limit what would typically be a 60-minute meeting to 45 minutes or move a meeting to an outdoor space).
SAMPLE RESOURCES

ARTICLES & BOOKS


Brown, B. (2010). The gifts of imperfection: Let go of who you think you’re supposed to be and embrace who you are. Center City, MN: Hazelden.


U. S. Surgeon General’s Framework for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being 2022


WEBSITES

Center for the Advancement of Well-Being (CWB)
Greater Good Science Center
Random Acts of Kindness Foundation
Self-Compassion Website (Kristin Neff)
Thrive Global
The Science of Well-Being Course (Laurie Santos)
The Washington Post Well-Being

PODCASTS & VIDEOS

Ten Percent Happier with Dan Harris
Have the Courage to Stand Alone
Feel Better. Live More. Dr. Rangan Chatterjee
The One You Feed with Eric Zimmer
How to Fail with Elizabeth Day
Happier with Gretchen Rubin
The Kindness Podcast
Unlocking Us with Brené Brown