Healthy Campus Case Study

‘A Healthy MTU’ A Mixed Methods Baseline Needs Analysis to Empirically Inform a Campus Health Promotion Initiative within an Irish Higher Education Setting

Name of institution and initiative lead
Munster Technological University (Cork Campuses). This research was led by an Academic Team (one PhD candidate and two Academic Supervisors) within the Dept. of Sport, Leisure & Childhood Studies at Munster Technological University (Bishopstown Campus). The proposed case study presentation will comprise pertinent excerpts from this research, in addition to a discussion of the key recommendations for practice and policy arising from same.

Date and timeframe
2016 to 2022

What was the reach?
The baseline phase of research engaged with the following participants:
Quantitative Phase: comprehensive student (n=2,671) and staff (n=279) datasets.
Qualitative Phase: in-depth qualitative sessions (i.e., either semi-structured interviews, dyadic interviews, or focus groups) with 34 cross-campus stakeholders (including Senior Management, Professional Management & Support Staff [PMSS], Post-graduate Students, Undergraduate Students, Alumni).

Aims and Objectives
The overarching aims were to (i) investigate student and staff health and wellbeing within the case HEI setting (‘Cork campuses of Munster Technological University’);
In its entirety, the programme of research was comprised of five sequential studies, each of which was conceptualized to achieve distinct research objectives as follows:
1. Study One (Bickerdike et al., 2019) Investigate students’ health and lifestyle parameters identify significant predictors of students’ positive mental health;
2. Study Two (Bickerdike et al., 2022) Explore the health and lifestyle parameters of staff determine whether significant differences in key organizational (self-reported absenteeism, length of service, weekly working hours) and public-health metrics of interest (BMI, perceived stress) exist between staff who exhibit the ‘healthy’ clustered lifestyle patterns, relative to staff exhibiting less optimal lifestyles;
3. Study Three Comparatively analyse the cumulative health risk, and self-perceived metrics, reported by students and staff of the case HEI;
4. Study Four Qualitatively examine the lived experiences of students and staff to identify extant barriers to, and/or facilitators of, health and wellbeing under the remit of the case HEI;
5. Study Five Ellicit and explore student and staff perceptions regarding optimal operational structures, resourcing models and the feasible scope of a campus HP initiative within the case HEI.
Similarly, to previous work (Dooris et al., 2010; Dooris et al., 2020), identify any latent ‘drivers’ and/or internal synergies that could serve to progress the implementation of a Healthy University-aligned campus health promotion initiative, within the operational ecosystem of the case HEI.

Aligned frameworks, policies, or strategies
Okanagan Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges
Irish Healthy Campus Charter and Framework
Aligned national, sectoral, and/or intra-institutional policies and agendas, including:
Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion
HEA National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework
Student Sport Ireland

Aligned frameworks, policies, or strategies
HEA System Performance Framework
Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025
Healthy Ireland at Work (National Framework for Healthy Workplaces in Ireland)
National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (e.g., DELTA Awards, enabling success through student transitions, embedding wellbeing within the curriculum)
Athena Swan
EDI policies at institutional, sectoral and national level
HR policies (institutional, sectoral, national)

Project Collaborators
Internal stakeholders:
Student participants
Staff participants
Note that a myriad of cross-campus stakeholders participated in the qualitative data collection (Senior Management, Faculty, Professional Management and Support Staff [PMSS], Post-Graduate Students, Alumni and Undergraduate Students).
This research was continuously endorsed and supported by (i) the Registrar’s Office of the case HEI (Cork Campuses of MTU), (ii) ‘AnSEO’ (MTU Cork Office of Student Engagement), and (iii) Dept. of Sport, Leisure & Childhood Studies.

Key Learning Points
As a key learning point, it emerged that greater structural empowerment of health and wellbeing is required within contemporary HEIs in Ireland. It was notable that both students and staff qualitatively described universal ideological support for the promotion of health and wellbeing, and wholly appreciated the intricate associations between health, happiness, academic achievement, social belonging, and quality of life. However, fundamental socio-ecological and indeed sectoral barriers appeared to impact upon the campus population’s collective capacity and agency to habitually engage in health promoting behaviors.

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<th>Topic</th>
<th>Population Group</th>
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<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>Students</td>
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<td>Whole Campus Approach</td>
<td>Substance Misuse</td>
<td>Wellbeing on the Curriculum</td>
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<td>Campus Environment (Facilities &amp; Services)</td>
<td>Healthy Eating / Food</td>
<td>Other (Designated research programme/strategy)</td>
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<td>Personal &amp; Professional Development</td>
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