

Wellness Inventory:

A look at the incoming first-year students

Student Life Research & Assessment

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INTRODUCTION

The pilot Wellness Inventory is a comprehensive measure of the well-being of incoming first-year students. The instrument was designed after reviewing extant literature on college student wellness. In the pilot phase, all incoming first-year students were invited to take the survey prior to the start of classes in fall 2011. Students who were enrolled in the Undergraduate Admissions and First-Year Experience orientation course on Carmen, the primary learning platform at The Ohio State University, were solicited to take the assessment prior to entering Ohio State. After completing the consent form (in the form of a Carmen “quiz”), students were offered a link to the wellness inventory. Students could also elect to have their educational records accessed by institutional researchers over time, so that the aggregate inventory results can be related to institutional indicators such as GPA, retention, and residence.

METHODOLOGY

Of the 4,215 students who were invited to take the survey 3,582 responded, yielding a response rate of 85.0%. Researchers performed an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principle axis factoring to examine underlying factors that contribute to overall wellness of survey respondents. Past research indicates that different areas of wellness correlate with each other, suggesting oblique rotation is appropriate. While the entire results of the EFA are outside the scope of this brief, the factor structure is used to organize the reporting of data.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Respondents who report more social connectedness also report more positive evaluations of their physical health and body image.
- Ability to cope with one’s daily stress is inversely correlated with both depression and anxiety ($r = -.389$, $r = -.380$).
- While **87.2%** of respondents are confident they can exercise regularly, only **60.1%** report exercising 3–5 times per week.
- **74%** of students report that they never consume alcohol.
- **45.6%** of students consider themselves to be spiritual.
- **48.5%** of students are concerned about their financial future.
- **94.3%** of students feel that their current studies will be helpful to their future career.

DEMOGRAPHICS

| Gender | Sample | Race/Ethnicity | Sample |
|--------|--------|----------------------------------|--------|
| Male | 46.4% | American Indian/ Native American | .4% |
| Female | 53.6% | Asian/ Pacific Islander | 5.9% |
| | | Black/ African American | 3.8% |
| | | Hispanic/ Latino(a) | 2.7% |
| | | White/ Caucasian | 83.6% |
| | | Multiracial | 3.6% |

Multiracial and White students were over-represented, while African American students were underrepresented. In addition, male students were underrepresented while females were overrepresented.

FINDINGS

These findings are separated into the factors extracted by the exploratory factor analysis. Despite this separation, these factors are correlated with each other, indicative of the interrelatedness of the dimensions of wellness appearing in the data. Correlations are designated as weak (.2–.3), moderate (.3–.4), strong (.4–.7), and very strong (.7–1.0).

SOCIAL

Past research indicates that social connectedness is positively correlated with other areas of wellness, including mental and physical health. Smith (2007) found that perceived social desirability is inversely correlated with psychological distress. The data support this relationship, with social desirability inversely correlated with both depression ($r = -.258$) and anxiety ($r = -.217$).

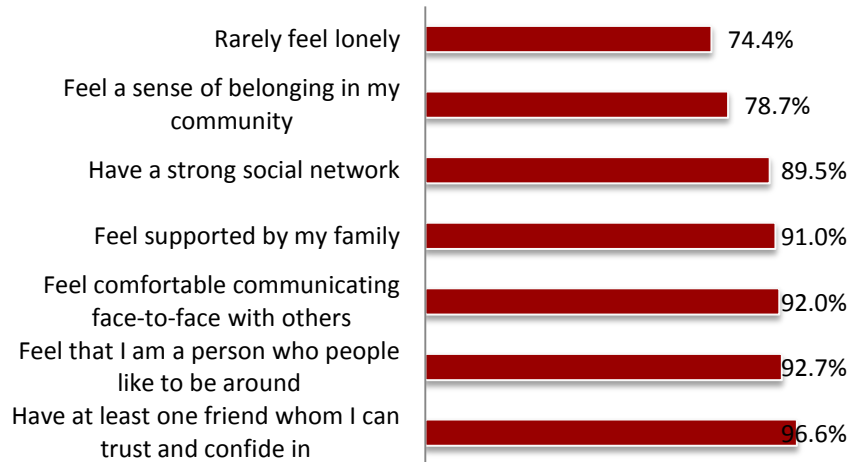
Ponzetti (1990) and Vartanian and Hopkinson (2010) found that students with more social connections report more positive evaluations of their health and body image. Results from this data set support this association (see table, right).

Correlations between social connectedness and depression are consistent with past research (Vartanian & Hopkinson, 2010; Keyes, 1998); these data indicate that loneliness and depression have a strong correlation ($r = .477$).

MENTAL HEALTH

The absence of depression and anxiety are seen as major indicators of mental health. Bovier, Chamot, and Perneger (2004) found that the ability to cope with stress predicts better mental health. The data indicate that anxiety and depression have moderate negative correlations with coping with daily stress ($r = -.380$, $r = -.389$), and depression and anxiety have a strong positive correlation with each other ($r = .615$).

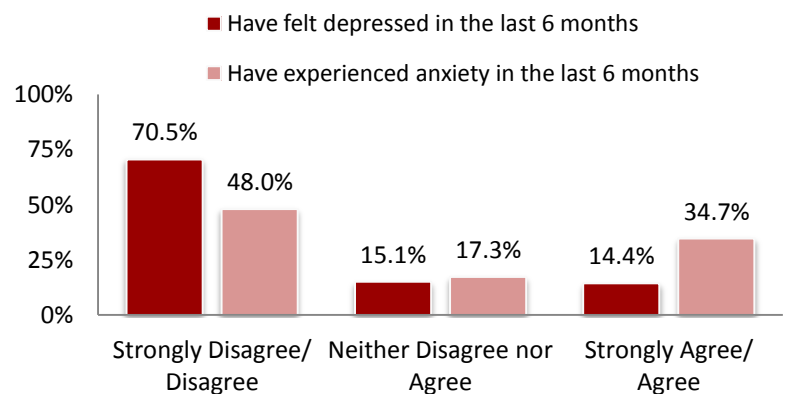
Social Items



Strongly Agree and Agree

| Correlations (r) | Satisfaction with physical health | Positive body image |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Community belonging | .324 | .360 |
| Strong social network | .331 | .336 |
| Rarely feel lonely | .363 | .391 |

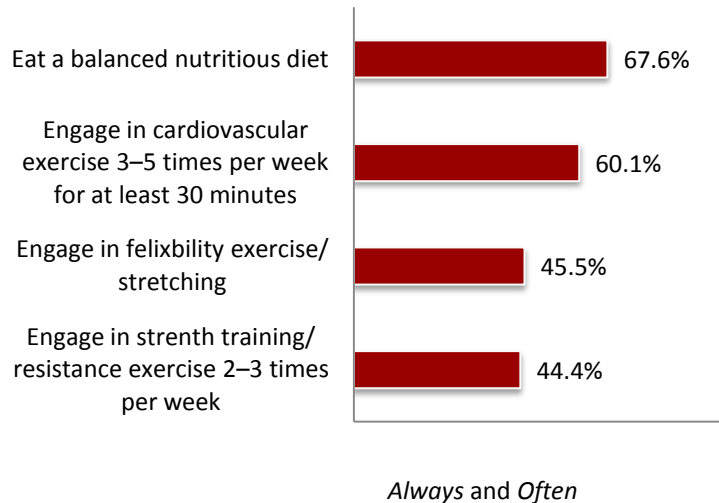
Depression and Anxiety



PHYSICAL

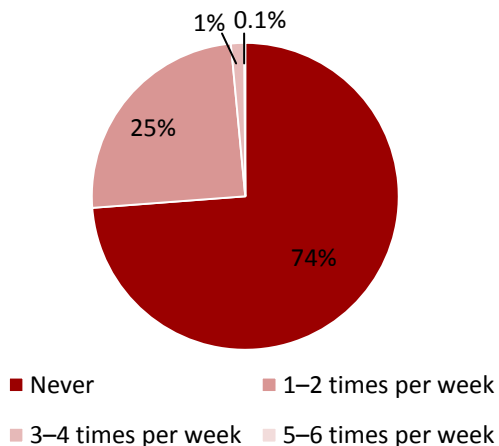
Research has found a relationship between mental health and exercise self-efficacy (Sidman, D’Abundo, & Hritz, 2009). The data indicate that exercise efficacy is moderately correlated with the ability to cope with stress ($r = .321$). The majority of students (87.2%) *strongly agrees* or *agrees* that they are confident that they can exercise regularly. However, responses to questions assessing frequency of exercise indicate that this confidence does not always translate into action. These lower rates of exercise are of increasing concern considering that Bray and Born (2004) found that exercise decreases significantly from high school to the first two months of college. Future studies should examine barriers to exercise among incoming first-year students to counter this trend. Similar to exercise efficacy, while 84.2% of students *strongly agree* or *agree* that they can maintain a healthy diet, only 67.6% *always* or *often* eat a balanced nutritious diet.

Physical Items

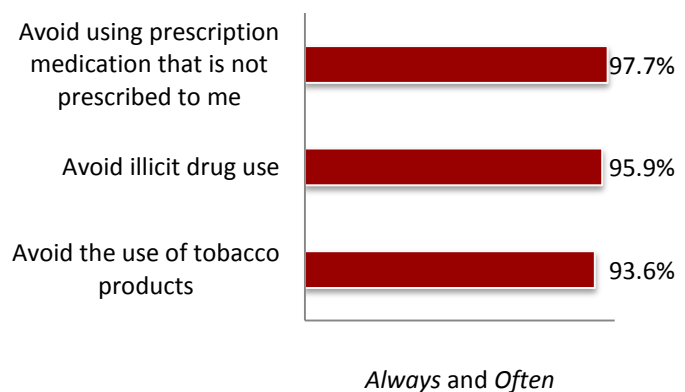


TOBACCO, ALCOHOL, AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Alcohol Use



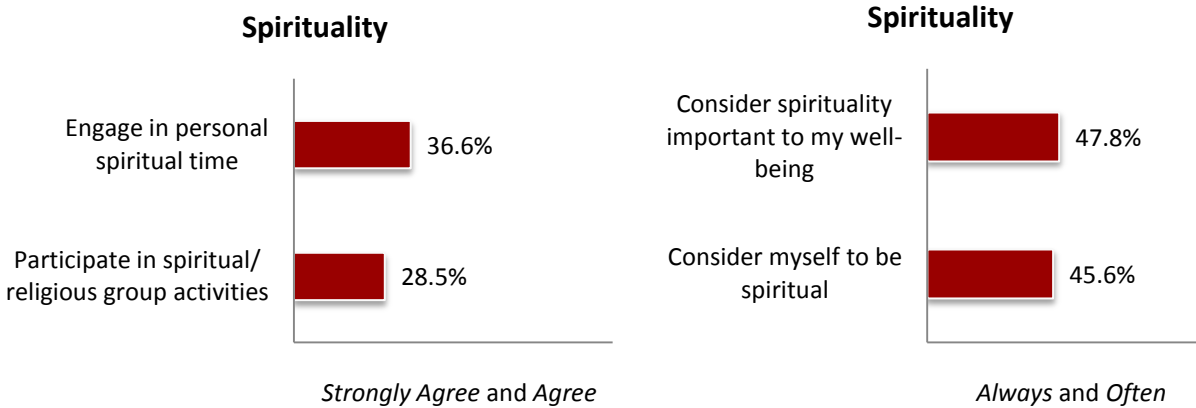
Tobacco and Substance Abuse



While numerous studies of college students found that spirituality was correlated with decreased tobacco, alcohol, and substance use (Cronce & Corbin, 2010; Seybold & Hill, 2001; Nelms, Hutchins, Hutchins, & Pursley, 2007; VonDras, Schmitt, & Marx, 2007; Wood & Hebert, 2005) there were no significant correlations between these items in this data set. The lack of correlation may be explained by the low levels of use of these substances (see charts above).

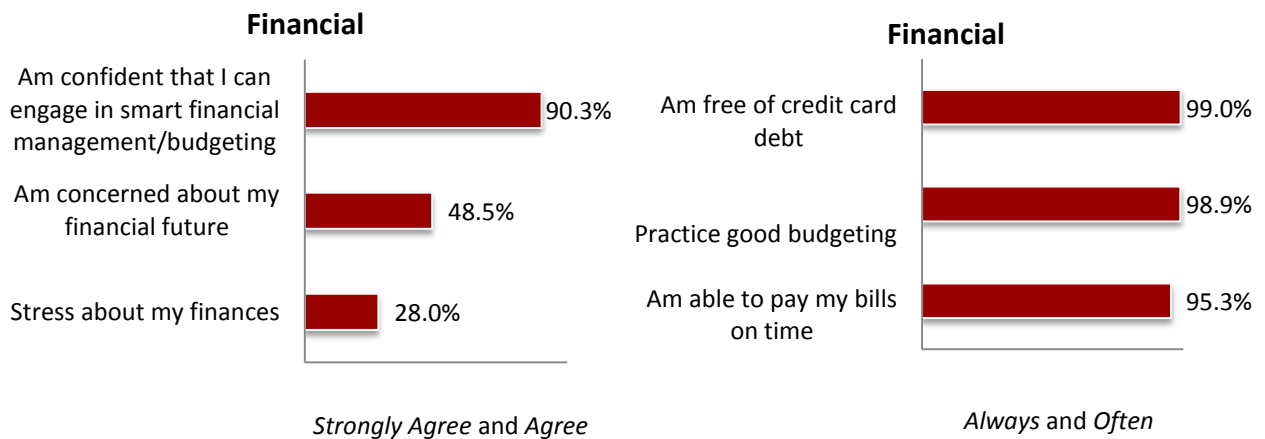
SPIRITUAL

Research suggests relationships exist between spirituality and exercise (Nagel & Squotas-Emch, 2007; Nelms et al., 2007), spirituality and mental health (Taliaferro, Rienzo, Pigg, Miller, & Dodd, 2009; Seybold, 2001), and spirituality and social wellness (Seybold & Hill, 2001; Taliaferro et al., 2009). However, this study shows no significant correlations between spirituality and exercise or between spirituality and mental health. Spirituality was weakly correlated with feeling a sense of belonging to one's community ($r = .235$), but not with other indicators of social wellness. Engaging in personal spiritual time is moderately correlated with "having a strong set of values that I live by" ($r = .326$).



FINANCIAL

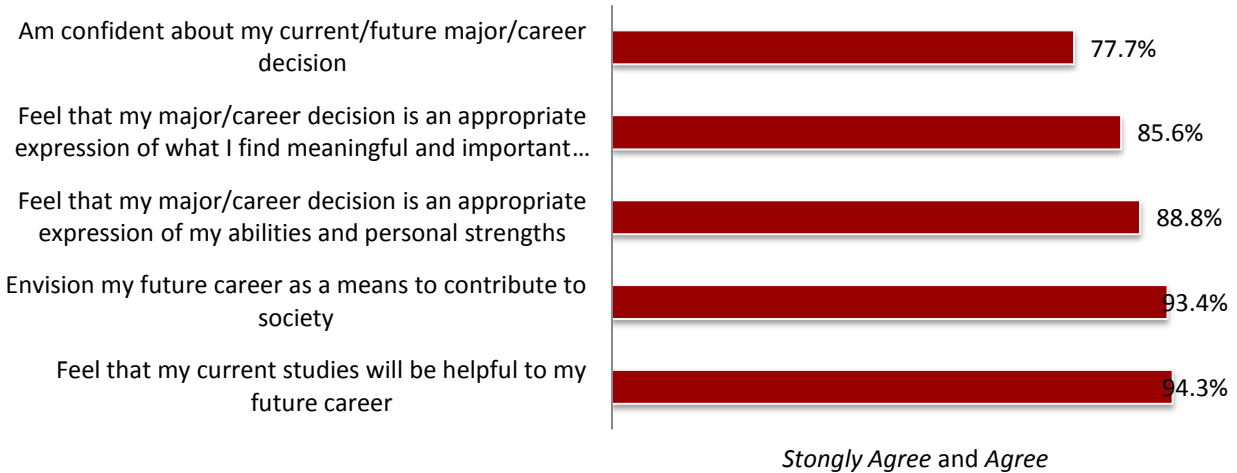
Other research indicates that financial wellness has a direct relationship with mental health (Ross, Cleland, & Macleod, 2006). The data support this finding, with financial stress correlating with both depression ($r = .233$) and anxiety ($r = .277$). The results for the financial wellness questions are skewed towards the positive end of the scale (*Strongly Agree/Always*), which could be explained in part by the age of the respondents. As credit cards are not issued to minors without a cosigner, many of the incoming traditionally-aged first-year students may not have had the opportunity to accumulate credit card debt. Other studies of financial wellness at Ohio State will help to track students longitudinally. In addition, interventions can be used to ensure that students maintain these high levels of financial wellness.



MAJOR AND CAREER

Questions regarding future career choice are indicative of wellness. Dorn (1992) found that satisfaction with one's career is associated with better emotional well-being. The data indicate that career choices that are consistent with what one finds meaningful in life are moderately correlated with feeling that one's life has purpose ($r = .339$). In turn, feeling that one's life has purpose is moderately inversely correlated with depression ($r = -.306$).

Major and Career



IMPLICATIONS

It is important to remember that this is the pilot of this instrument. Survey items will be refined to improve the instrument's reliability and validity. In addition, the factor structure will continue to be specified and confirmed over subsequent years.

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