

Grounding Approaches in Diversity

Conceptual Tool



Part of the Holistic Mental Health Approaches Toolkit.

Introduction

About the Tools and Toolkits

These tools and toolkits are hosted by **Healthy Campus Alberta**, a provincial community of practice committed to cultivating caring campus communities in Alberta. Originally developed by **Alberta Campus Mental Health Innovation** (an initiative carried out by the **Alberta Students Executive Council**), the tools and toolkits are learning-focused, living documents that serve to support our community of practice.

About the Holistic Mental Health Approaches Toolkit

This toolkit is an introduction to systemic and comprehensive approaches to a mentally healthy campus and community strategy. It has been developed to support the policy-mandated collaboration of the Alberta post-secondary student mental health strategy. Achieving the intended outcomes of this strategy requires post-secondary institutions, student leaders, healthcare organizations and community support agencies to work closely together to align services and supports, and navigate student transitions. This requires common understanding of terms and diverse worldviews, shared frameworks, and tools. This toolkit can be used to support purposeful, theory-based approaches for designing and implementing health promoting and health-enabling environments strategies.

About Grounding Approaches in Diversity

The **Grounding Approaches in Diversity** tool provides some tools for considering the possible diversity of student experiences, and can be used for the range of strategies involved in a comprehensive strategy (i.e. one that aims to cover both health promotion and illness or disorder diagnosis, treatment, and recovery-oriented services).

Who could use this tool?

- Individual services, programs, and organizations
- Regional hubs;
- Funders and government.

What purposes could this tool serve?

- Learning about the student experience and ways to center the student experience in mental health strategies;
- Offering helpful tools to be used in everyday practice by staff, and faculty.

The Student Experience

The key to effectively improving students' mental health and reducing the impact of mental illness, disorders and addictions is, from the very early thinking and design stage, to understand the student experience. This means to understand how a student understands their experience.

This is a different process of development. It means spending time up front understanding the range of student perspectives, and the range of contexts in which the services will need to be carried out. Then, the specific design of services can be thought through by using theory or evidence to choose which type of service will have the desired impact.

Diversity

As noted in other sections of the toolkits, post-secondary students, campuses, communities are diverse in a number of ways. The tools in this section are intended to assist in designing and 'road testing' early prototype designs against the particular diversity of students and settings in the particular context. The tools in this section can be used for either mental illness / disorders / addictions strategies or positive mental health strategies.

These tools are a starter set – as experience is gained, and initiatives can engage with more diversity, additional profiles and scenarios can be developed. Ideas can be posted on the community conversation section of the website so the post-secondary student mental health community can benefit from the range of experience in culturally competent approaches to ecological capacity building.

Helpful Tools



View the [Student Led Initiatives Toolkit](#).

- Student Journey Map
- Overview of "Mental Health"
- Mentally Healthy Campus Maturity Model



View the [Complex Collaboration Toolkit](#)

- Complex Collaboration Model

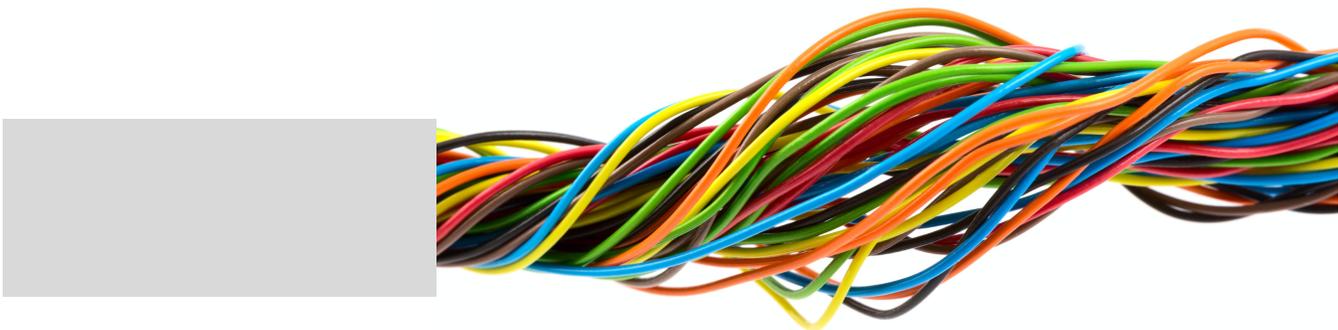
Diversity in Capacities and Capabilities

An important aspect of effective health-promoting and capacity building strategies is meeting the student where they are at. This then means a strategy must be able to be adapted for students' different capacity and capabilities – which influence the ways they respond to challenges, to stress as well as the ways they learn from experience.

Capability, Capacity, Competency

Our *capacity* includes our ability to draw on both supports from our environment as well as the set of emotional, physical, psychological, creative and spiritual capabilities we have developed in the course of our lives.

This toolkit uses the vehicle of the combined strands of a person's positive mental health as *capacity*, with individual strands as *capabilities* (e.g., emotional, social, creative, spiritual, or cognitive capabilities). The strength of individual capabilities is referred to as *competency*.



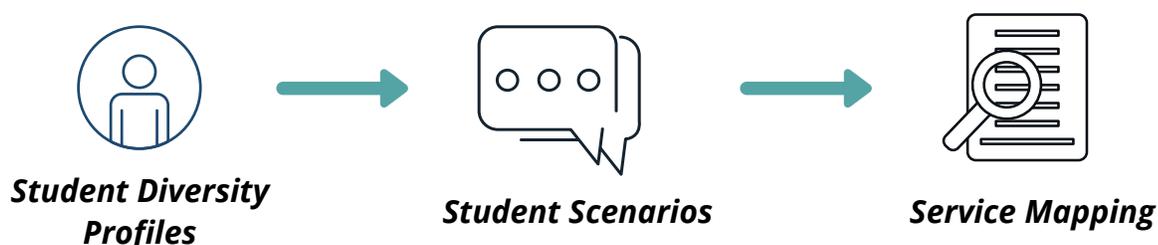
The cable image is a way to picture the relationship between capacity, capabilities and competencies. The grey casing represents capacity. Within that, the twisted colored plastic wires represent the various capabilities, and that they interact with each other. Within each of these capabilities are a variety of competencies. Just as a cable is made stronger by including additional plastic wires, or by strengthening individual copper wires, so a person's positive mental health is improved by strengthening individual competencies or by adding additional capabilities.

Developing and improving these key functions are basic health promotion challenges. As brains can remain plastic throughout life with continuous learning, because we now know brain pathways can be changed with practice, seasoned students also benefit from health promoting strategies.

Grounding Approaches in Diversity Tool

There is a wide diversity of student characteristics that influence the design of approaches, whether those are positive mental health- or illness-oriented strategies. It is important to understand the diversity of students - and the diversity of their experiences - when designing a holistic mental health approach.

The Grounding Approaches in Diversity Tool is a three-part tool. With this tool, you can complete interactive activities that will help you and your team brainstorm student diversity on your campus and map out how your approach could best support these students.



Step One: Student Diversity Profiles

In this tool, you will understand domains of student diversity, view sample student profiles, and create your own profiles.

Step Two: Student Scenarios

In this tool, you will view sample student scenarios and create your own student scenarios.

Step Three: Service Mapping

In this tool, you will evaluate whether your campus' services meet the needs of diverse students on your campus.



The [Student Journey Map](#) complements this tool.

Resources



View the rest of the [Holistic Mental Health Approaches Toolkit](#)



Access the [Promising Practices toolkit](#) to learn more about innovative approaches for supporting student mental health.

Questions for Consideration

- Have you considered how your programs/services meet the diverse needs of students? What students might be excluded?
- How are student transitions incorporated in your programs/services?
- How do your programs/services find a balance between providing for all students and accommodating students' diversity?