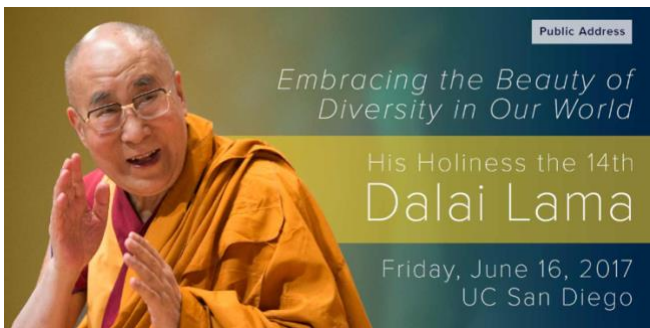


Learning Sustainable Well-Being Initiative
Karen Dobkins, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology

Background

In this bustling modern world, anxiety and depression are on the rise. People spend a lot of time ruminating (regretting the past, worrying about the future) and are overly concerned about their identity and status (exacerbated by social media). This trend is especially noticeable in college students, who are on their own for the first time, are facing immense academic and social pressures, yet have no practice in place for their well-being. As the Dalai Lama pointed out in his 2017 commencement speech at UCSD, universities were once religious institutions, which provided *both* academic and spiritual guidance, but with the secularization of universities, that spiritual guidance is painfully missing. The solution is for universities to implement a comprehensive system of guidance so that students can flourish academically, emotionally and personally.



The Need at UCSD

Undergrads. At UCSD, data show that there are high rates of feeling depressed, stressed or upset (over 36% of students report frequently and/or always feeling this way, UCUES Survey, 2016), and *greater* than the national average rates of loneliness (Arnold & Dobkins, Bondi & Dobkins, unpublished data). Some of this increased prevalence is due to unique challenges at UCSD:

- a highly competitive atmosphere, as a top-ranked university
- a large transfer rate (30%), which makes it harder for those students to integrate
- a large international population (10%, mainly from Asia), which results in culture shock and a sense of non-belonging
- a large, and growing, student body (> 36K), *which makes it hard for students to connect with professors*
- in general, there is low morale, with students taking, and professors teaching, classes because they “need to” rather than “honoring the transfer of knowledge”.

What UCSD offers for student well-being and why it is not good enough

Like all universities, UCSD has a “Counseling and Psychological Services” (CAPS) for students in need (both undergrads and medical students). Unfortunately, students who experience extreme stress/depression say they cannot be seen at CAPS in a timely fashion, and many do not want to go in fear of being stigmatized. In addition, although UCSD has several resources/programs to help students in need, these resources are decentralized and do not provide students with an all-inclusive course on preventive mental health.

Bottom Line: *Students are in need of a “preventive mental health” plan at UCSD, couched in a system they know how to navigate, i.e., taking classes for credit.*

**Learning Sustainable Well-Being (LSW) is a 10 week (16 hour) course in learning....
*Compassion for Self and Others***

The LSW initiative was conceived by Professor Dobkins in 2018, *with the ultimate goal of testing the effectiveness of scaling up a campus-wide 1-unit class on mental well-being (being taught by Dobkins since 2014).*

Brief History of the LSW Course

Spring 2014 – Spring 2019: “Compassion for Self and Others” (taught at UCSD 1 - 2x/year)

- Freshman seminar TMC87, on “compassion for self and others”
- 20 person class, 1x/week for 1’20”
- I received \$1000 (to be used for my lab)
- 1 unit, P/NP based solely on attendance
- Through an IRB, we collect well-being data pre- and post-class
- Data, and testimonials, show improvements in well-being
- For Fall 2018, we had control data, i.e., students tested in the same quarter as the LSW students, and who answered being “very interested in a 1 unit well-being course” on our survey.

Spring 2019: I get permission to teach as a 100-person class, with 4 UGIAs

Changed name to “**Psych 88: Learning Sustainable Well-being (LSW): Compassion for Self and Others**”

*By end of Spring 2021, I will have taught “Psych 88: LSW” 4 times
(once in person, 3x remotely because of Covid)*

Fall 2019, Spring 2020, Fall 2020, Spring 2021

- 100 person class, 1x/week for 1’20” (has filled, with a waitlist, every time)
- I received \$1000 (to be used for my lab)
- 1 unit, P/NP based on
 - Weekly reflection essays “what I learned this week”
 - final 2 minute video “what was my breakthrough from this class”
- 4 UGIAs are trained by me to lead the exercises, so that they can help facilitate now that the class is so large (100 person, which makes each breakout group = 20 person)
- Through an IRB, we collect well-being data pre- and post-class, *this time with a control group of people interested in taking the class, but who are not currently taking it*
- Data, and testimonials, show improvements in well-being (compared to **controls**)
- **Controls** are students tested in the same quarter as the LSW students, and who answer being “very interested in a 1 unit well-being course” on our survey.
- *Data are still being analyzed, including a 5 month follow up*

In Fall, 2021, I will teach in person

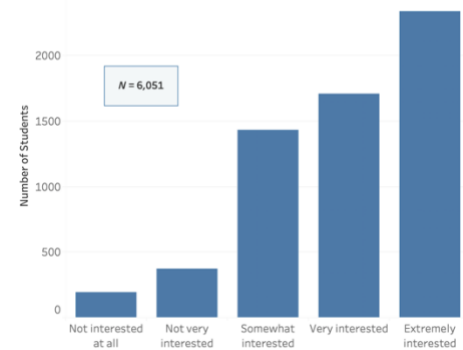
DATA to date

- 1) *Quantitative*: By Fall 2021, we will have data from about
 - 300 people taught over zoom (Spring 2020, Fall 2020, Spring 2021)
 - 200 people taught in person (Fall 2019, Fall 2021).....allowing us to compare effectiveness for in person vs. remote
- 2) *Qualitative*: We have many testimonials written over the years and are now embarking on collecting interview data and analyzing the data qualitatively, which is now a common methodology in the Dobkins lab.

Sample Data

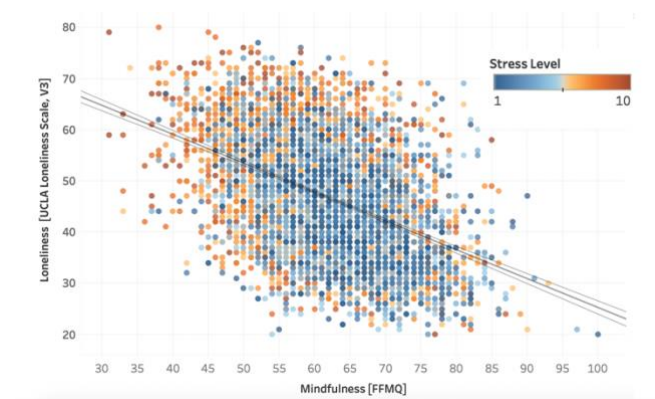
Since Fall 2018, the Dobkins lab has been collecting data to examine the following:

- A) Interest in a Well-Being Class (Shown: Spring 2019 data, although data are still being collected): We asked 6051 students at UCSD how interested they would be in taking a well-being class if it counted for credit. Not only is there strong interest, the mode response from students is “extremely interested”.



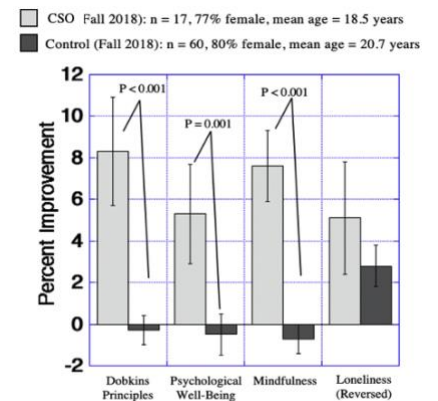
- B) Does Mindfulness Decrease Loneliness and Stress? (Shown: Spring 2019 data, although data are still being collected)

In the sample of 6051, we looked at the relationship between trait Mindfulness and i) Loneliness and ii) Stress. We see that students higher in trait Mindfulness have significantly less Loneliness and Stress, suggesting that courses in Mindfulness should help the loneliness (and stress) problem at UCSD.



- C) Effectiveness of Course on Well-Being (Fall 2018 Data): Since 2014, Dobkins has been teaching a well-being class at UCSD (*as a freshman seminar, 1.5 hours/week to class sizes of 20, in a roundtable format*) entitled “Compassion for Self and Others” (based on Mindfulness, Positive Psychology, Cognitive Therapy and Neuroscience, see [syllabus](#)).

Data collected from Fall 2018, which compared Compassion for Self and Others (CSO) students to a wait-list control, showed significant improvements in practicing the principles of the course, Psychological well-being, and trait Mindfulness.



- D) Academic Success vs. Well-Being: Working with the Appointment of University Registrar and the Privacy Officer at Academic Affairs, and with our IRB approval (#161450), we are obtaining academic records from UCSD students to determine the *link* between well-being and academic success (GPA, retention, time to graduate, placement). *Data are not yet analyzed.*

Pilot Project (2021): Test the Effectiveness of Scaling up Well-Being Courses for Undergrads

A) Overview

- 1) Task Force: Put together a task force for how best to administer this pilot project, including deciding on curriculum. *Progress*:
 - Dobkins, Jenna Tutjer and Jane Chun have had several meetings about how to develop the curriculum and “train the trainer”.
 - Other people on the main campus are interested, like Laleh Quinn (Cognitive Science) and Emily Troemel (Biology), both of whom teach an LSW-like class since Fall 2020.
 - Jane Chun (with years of experience teaching CCT) and Karen (with years of experience teaching LSW) plan to work together to create a training that interested professors go through to ready them to teach “**LSW: Compassion for Self and Others (CSO)**”in a way that feels right for them (pulling from their own areas of wisdom and expertise).

- 2) A Series of LSW classes:
 - The Compassion for Self and Others (CSO) course is envisioned to be one of a series of LSW courses at UCSD, with others being focused on areas such as
 - Physical Health and Stress
 - Setting up a Career/Family
 - Managing Finances
 - The 2021 pilot program would, for now, only focus on the CSO course

- 3) Professors get Trained to Teach CSO:
Progress:
 - As part of a campus-wide survey (since Fall 2019), the Dobkins lab has asked students to name professors they think would be good at teaching a class on well-being. We have compiled the list of professors with the most votes, who can now be approached to join the initiative (although it will be open to any professor who is interested).
 - Professors get paid to go through a training program, as well as paid to teach the course (see below)
 - It seems important to have professors teach this course as a way to build community at UCSD, since students typically feel disconnected from professors. Still, we would want to let non-professors teach as well.

- 4) Target Student Population
 - The idea is to target a specific cohort of students at UCSD. Perhaps one of the six colleges, or “premed” students, or even a department like Psychology.
 - Accommodate ~ 1400 students for a year-long pilot program (open to all grade levels)
 - Start program in Summer 2021, naming the professors who will be teaching
 - Professors trained to teach in Fall 2021, and courses set up for Winter and Spring 2022
 - 7 – 10 professors teach in both Winter and Spring 2022, 100 students/class
 - Data collection and analysis: Summer 2022

B) Budget to cover

- 1) Training of Professors (2 days of attending the course + 3 days intensive training on how to teach)
 - a) Leaders of the training get paid (partial summer salary)
 - b) Professors get paid to be trained and paid to teach
- 2) Parttime Administrative Assistant
- 3) Grad Student (GSR) for analyzing data
- 4) Future: Payment of UGIAs