

# Integrating Mental Wellness to Enhance Student Success

Laura Opton, DHSc, RN, CNE, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Nursing

*Co-Author(s): Rachel Chapman, MSN, RN, CCRN-k, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Nursing; Candace Frizzi, MSN, RN, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Nursing; Molly Lee, MSN, RN, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Nursing; Irene Salinas, DNP, RN, CNE-cl, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Nursing; Christy Weaver, DNP, APRN, FNP-C, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Nursing*

**Topic:** Leading & Advancing Improvements in Health, Health Care, & Higher Education

**Category:** Quality Improvement/Evidence-Based Practice Project

---

## Abstract

### Background/Introduction

Nursing students face a variety of mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression. This student population is vulnerable to stressors due to rigors of nursing school, finances, and life-work-school balance issues, often exacerbating pre-existing mental health challenges (Kondo et al., 2023). Nursing faculty report increases in mental health issues in students since COVID-19, and schools are challenged to create programs to promote mental wellness (Karaca et al., 2019).

### Purpose

The purpose of this presentation is to describe a QI project advancing improvements in the mental wellness of nursing students.

### Methods or Processes/Procedures

One health sciences center (HSC) focused the accreditation-required Quality Enhancement Plan on student mental health. The School of Nursing (SON) within the HSC further developed a Wellness Program, appointed an Associate Dean for Wellness, and created program-specific processes. Strategies adopted by the Accelerated BSN Program included: • Designation of a faculty Success Coordinator • Implementation of a student mental health algorithm for triage and referral by faculty to the wellness team • Inclusion of success and resiliency strategies as curricular adjuncts • Development of a Student Success webpage

### Results

The algorithm utilized by faculty in AY2023 referred 28 ABSN students to the Wellness Program for supportive services, ranging from financial assistance to mental health crisis management. Retention Counselors across 7 sites collaboratively planned hybrid seminars addressing selected topics: study techniques, test-taking, success strategies, and available resources. Content was posted on the Student Success webpage. Additionally, a grant was awarded to support other wellness activities. Wellness Program feedback reflects overall improvement of student outcomes.

### Limitations

Limitations include faculty understanding of referral process (i.e. location of online referral form) and student follow up.

### Conclusions/Implications for Practice

The SON Wellness Program was identified as an exemplar, providing a template for other HSC programs and could be replicated at other institutions to advance improvements in student wellness.

---

## Biography

Laura Opton serves as Professor and Associate Dean/Department Chair at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center. Dr. Opton demonstrates a commitment to nursing education and a passion for leadership, global health and community advocacy. She has been an educator since 1996, teaching courses via face-to-face and online modalities at prelicensure, RN to BSN, and graduate levels. She has participated in and led international programs with students to Costa Rica, Italy, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru to support health initiatives within these regions. Her passion for global health was recognized by presentation of the TTUHSC President's Excellence in Interprofessional Teamwork Award.

---

## Contact Information

Laura Opton, DHSc, RN, CNE  
Professor/Associate Dean and Department Chair  
Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center  
laura.opton@ttuhsc.edu  
(806) 743-3506

---