



STUDENT FEEDBACK ON CAMPUS WELLBEING SUPPORT

Focus Group Findings on General Wellbeing, Basic Needs,
Mental Health, Power-based Violence and Substance Use

Executive Summary

Spring 2022

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Student Health and Wellness



CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS.....	3
BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE.....	4
METHODS	4
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION	5
IDENTITY SPECIFIC TAKEAWAYS	5
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	6
LIMITATIONS	11
DISCUSSION	11
RECOMMENDATIONS	12
CONCLUSION.....	17
APPENDIX A: KEY POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY IDENTITY ...	14
APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP QUESTION GUIDE.....	15



LEGEND

The following words/acronyms are used throughout the report. The table includes a definition or description of the acronym.

First-generation	Students whose parent(s) did not complete a four-year college or university degree
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and additional marginalized sexual identities
Non-traditional	Students who don't fall into traditional 18-24 age group
Multicultural	Black, Indigenous, and Students of Color (e.g. non-White racial identity)
Religious Affiliated	Affiliated with a religious group or organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the spring semester of 2022, 27 focus groups were conducted with 201 Iowa State University students who identified with one or more of the populations listed below:

- Financially Insecure Students
- First-generation Students
- Graduate and Professional Students
- International Students
- LGBTQ+ Students
- Non-Traditional Students
- Religious Identity and Affiliation (if any)
- Resident Assistants
- Students of Color
- Students with Disabilities
- Transfer Students
- Students Veterans

Participants cited *vital insights* into their campus wellbeing, such as:

- The need for a supportive campus with accessible wellbeing resources
- The importance of sleep management
- The need for access to affordable, nourishing, and culturally representative foods and other basic need support
- The importance of, and need for more, mental health promotion and education
- The importance of, and need for more, prevention efforts around power-based personal violence, particularly sexual violence
- The need for more substance use education and prevention efforts

Key *obstacles* to wellbeing were described:

- Students faced challenges with mental health and wellbeing services, including:
 - Concern with the short-term counseling model
 - Long wait times to be seen by campus counselors
 - Lack of multi-cultural counselors and other health and wellbeing staff
 - Stigma around mental health and help-seeking behaviors
- Students' wellbeing was challenged by a variety of factors, including:
 - Lack of access to affordable, nourishing, and culturally representative food particularly in campus food pantry and food availability programs
 - Unrealistic expectations and inflexibility from professors that prevent students from being able to balance self-care and/or adequate sleep in addition to coursework
 - Lack of transparency and information from the university about health and safety issues, particularly sexual violence
 - Long SafeRide wait times and limited geographical routes for students wanting safe ride options when dark outside
 - Significant peer pressure to engage in substance use
 - Lack of faculty flexibility and understanding of students' wellbeing needs



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are some **recommendations** for supporting student wellbeing at Iowa State University based on student input.

FOR GENERAL WELLBEING AND BASIC NEEDS

1. Expand access to basic need support including affordable, nourishing, and culturally representative foods, and basic need products in campus food pantries and other basic need availability services.
2. Adopt a university wide communication plan to expand education and awareness of available wellbeing services to students.
3. Adopt strategies to create a sleep promoting environment, including access to education and services to improve student sleep.

FOR MENTAL HEALTH

1. Improve multi-cultural representation in Student Counseling Services and other health and wellbeing services.
2. Increase funding to Student Counseling Services to improve access to counseling appointments available to students, including adopting an embedded counselor model across all academic colleges and expanding telehealth appointment options available for students.
3. Increase faculty and staff knowledge through expanded education about supporting student mental health.
4. Adopt strategies and practices inside and outside the classroom that support student mental health, including enhanced class attendance flexibility.
5. Increase mental health promotion strategies and education for all students, including strategies that focus on reducing stigma and increasing help-seeking behaviors.

FOR POWER-BASED PERSONAL VIOLENCE

1. Expand prevention efforts and provide proactive communication to students regarding sexual assault emails and opt out options.
2. Expand SafeRide geographical routes and increase program funding to improve access and decrease wait times.

FOR SUBSTANCE USE

1. Enhance promotion to raise awareness of existing support groups and resources for students who struggle with substance use
2. Increase funding to provide more fun, “dry activities” (alcohol-free) on campus during evenings/weekends.



BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

BACKGROUND

Wellbeing is a significant priority and focus for Iowa State University (ISU) students. Based on existing ISU data (e.g. National College Health Assessment), student populations, when disaggregated by identity or student status, experience disparities in health outcomes and perceptions of wellbeing. These disparities are rooted in complex, systemic issues and inequities across various determinants that influence population health and wellbeing. As ISU works to become a health promoting university, it is critical to consistently engage students in data collection and ongoing feedback to work together to address barriers to wellbeing. This executive summary provides accounts of the overall findings from focus groups conducted with ISU students during spring semester 2022.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to gather knowledge about the existing health and wellbeing of Iowa State University students as well as barriers faced by students to achieving optimal health and wellbeing. The information gathered will inform Iowa State University about a range of health and wellbeing issues shared by students, and how Iowa State University can make improvements in wellbeing to strengthen our commitment to becoming the most welcoming and inclusive land grant institution.

METHODS

Twenty-seven focus groups were conducted during the spring 2022 semester. Focus groups were led by an Iowa State Student Health and Wellness graduate assistant who was trained in focus group methodology. Student participants were recruited via emails sent to staff listservs and departments who work with the target populations of interest, Student Health and Wellness social media channels, and word-of-mouth. Focus group promotion included a link to a university survey powered by Qualtrics to establish eligibility. Participants selected all of the identity-based groups in which they identified or belonged. If participants identified with more than one group listed, they had the opportunity to choose which identity was most salient to them. Participants were selected for each identity-based focus group (if eligible) by the order in which they took the survey until the desired participant number was reached. Up to thirteen students were selected for each group with the goal of having 8-10 students participate. In addition, four miscellaneous groups of thirteen students each were also selected to participate in order of survey completion with mixed representation from each of the identity groups. Student Wellness sent focus group invitation emails to 350 students and 201 students participated in the 27 focus groups. Participants received a \$75 gift card for their participation. Focus group sessions lasted about 90 minutes and were held remotely or in person. Each session had between four and thirteen participants.

All focus groups were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The Student Wellness graduate assistant coded and assessed each transcription. The data were organized using MAXQDA software.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

A total of 565 students completed the survey and volunteered for the focus groups, and 201 participated. Each student self-identified with one or more of the following identity groups: student of color, international student, student with disabilities, LGBTQ+ student, student veteran, first generation student, financially insecure student, graduate and professional student, transfer student, non-traditional student, religious identity and affiliation (if any), and/or resident assistant.

SELF-IDENTIFIED* with Identity Group

STUDENT IDENTITY GROUP	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS
Financially Insecure Students	61	30.50%
First Generation Students	71	35.50%
Graduate and Professional Students	63	31.50%
International Students	57	28.50%
LGBTQ+ Students	45	22.50%
Non-Traditional Students	18	9.00%
Religious Identity and Affiliation (if any)	28	14.00%
Resident Assistants	31	15.50%
Students of Color	26	13.00%
Students with Disabilities	19	9.50%
Student Veterans	6	3.00%
Transfer Students	40	20.00%

**students selected all groups in which they identified or belonged (n=201)*

PLACED into Identity Group

STUDENT IDENTITY GROUP	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS
Financially Insecure Students	11	5.47%
First Generation Students	16	7.96%
Graduate and Professional Students	23	11.44%
International Students	16	7.96%
LGBTQ+ Students	15	7.46%
Non-Traditional Students	17	8.46%
Religious Identity and Affiliation (if any)	12	5.97%
Resident Assistants	18	8.96%
Students of Color	13	6.47%
Students with Disabilities	13	6.47%
Student Veterans	6	2.99%
Transfer Students	11	5.47%
Miscellaneous*	30	14.93%

**focus groups that include members from each of the study criteria groups*

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

GENERAL WELLBEING AND BASIC NEEDS

Students most frequently named a supportive campus with resources, sleep management, and accessibility to nourishing, and culturally representative food as advantages to their general wellbeing, and expressed that such resources and support are needed to contribute to their success as students at Iowa State.

1. SUPPORTIVE CAMPUS WITH RESOURCES

Students indicated a supportive campus means that they can have their physical, mental, and emotional needs met while also having a sense of belonging, inclusivity, and safety. Participants reported that creating a supportive campus with a respectful community both on- and off-campus as advantageous to their health and wellbeing. Overall, students noted basic needs are fundamental to their success at Iowa State and that the university has supportive resources. Participants voiced that having consistently open communication between faculty and students, including but not limited to regular, in-person check-ins, allow students to feel supported by faculty. Students also mentioned they would benefit from more publicity on wellbeing resources and assistance for different identities, resources that meet students where they are, and enhanced faculty understanding that situational issues affect academic performance.

"A healthy campus is being in a healthy environment in terms of the professors are supportive of you. You have resources that you can reach out to for any kind of help. A healthy campus involves students being supported by the campus community. A healthy campus makes that information readily available. Resources are easily accessible, so it's not like you are digging through pages and pages. It should be something that's very obvious and easy for people to read and understand. Making sure the resources are posted around campus and students know about it." -Student from Miscellaneous Group

"A healthy campus involves students being supported by the campus community."

"A mark of an emotionally healthy campus would mean that there are opportunities to build relationships or build friendships and build community not only in your major and the things that you are studying but maybe with people who have similar backgrounds from you. Having support groups if there is something challenging that you can walk through together in community. I think connectedness is a good indicator of health as well." -Student from Miscellaneous Group

2. SLEEP MANAGEMENT

Participants reported that getting adequate sleep was challenging to balance alongside their school, work, and social life. Evening classes create challenges for students with getting food on campus because of limited dining hall/cafe hours. Students also reported that they would benefit from professors recording lectures for accessibility.

"It's really hard to balance school and get through it all. There are so many variables that go into it. Some weeks will be just crazy, and you'll find that you only get five hours of sleep [a night]. Not only with academics but with social events as well. You don't want to miss out on social events. There's a balance that needs to be made at some point." -Student from Miscellaneous Group

"It's really hard to balance school and get through it all."

"When having to work full-time to financially support myself, it's difficult to get a good amount of sleep when you have to come home and complete assignments and then having to go to bed late and get up early in the morning to attend class and then work. Anxiety definitely plays a role in that as well. I know a lot of my friends deal with the same issues of not having enough time to work, do school and have social activities, and get a decent amount of sleep." -Student from Miscellaneous Group

3. ACCESSIBILITY TO BASIC NEEDS SUPPORT

Participants cited that they would benefit from the university providing more nourishing and culturally representative foods. Participants voiced that campus food is expensive, making it difficult for them to eat nutritious foods. Students reported that they would benefit from having more accessibility to food such as through an expansion of food pantries throughout campus.

"Food is pretty expensive on campus. So that could be a problem for people who don't have a lot of money or are financially burdened." -Participant from Students of Color Group

"Having more nutritious and culturally-representative options available throughout campus for students would be nice."

"The university offers limited options for dietary restrictions and nourishing and culturally representative foods. Having more nutritious and culturally-representative options available throughout campus for students would be nice. It is difficult to find nourishing foods." -Student from Miscellaneous Group

MENTAL HEALTH

Students named mental health as being essential to their campus success. Students indicated a need for more faculty understanding and flexibility, as well as more counseling services, as potential ways to improve their wellbeing.

1. IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH

Participants voiced that mental health is significant to their campus success, explaining that having good mental health is vital and affects academic success and all aspects of their lives. Participants explained that not being mentally healthy can make it hard for students to continue participating in school and co-curricular activities. Having mental health resources is crucial to success. Participants stated that the campus has many resources and enhancing awareness and continually decreasing stigma to such information would be beneficial.

"I think mental health is super important, obviously. And I think it affects every part of your life [for counseling] or [to Student Counseling Services]; they're seen as weak if they need to utilize those resources. But I think it is important that they know that they have them and it's okay to use them. Because I think mental health affects things, especially academically, you can only take so much. So, I think a lot of the climate around mental health is just, yes, college is hard to figure out. And you have to just try hard because it's very hard. And instead of like understanding that these resources are here to be utilized and there is help available, people kind of seem too tough to be able to use these resources, even though I think it would really help them." -Student from Miscellaneous Group

"I kind of think there's a stigma that people don't want to go in; they're seen as weak if they need to utilize those resources."

"Mental health is very important. If you have a stress in any part of your life, I mean, in your personal life, or academic life or professional one, that will also have an effect on other parts of your life like, if you don't feel good mentally, then you will keep distance from friends, and you will just stay alone." -Student from Miscellaneous Group

2. FACULTY SUPPORT

Participants reported that faculty need to be more understanding if students are unable to attend class. Making lectures and class material accessible online would benefit students' mental health. Participants suggested that providing more training to faculty on how to support students around mental health would aid in student success.

"Professors and staff just went back to the regular scheduling [after changes made because of COVID]. Like, deadlines are deadlines; there's no understanding; we're still in the pandemic. And if you suffer, like, mentally from the pandemic, it's not just going to heal those two semesters, and they have long-term effects on how you're performing, how you're feeling, and stuff like that. I just feel like everything just kind of went back to how it was almost like very cold, very unsympathetic of professors. How they interact with their students, and like, some of my professors are understanding and lenient when I go through a struggle or something like that, but others are just very, like, very strict, very, I guess cold, and they don't really do much. And it's like, also hard for them. Like after hearing that from my own professors. Like, it's hard for me to go and reach out to someone else because that's just what I expect. If one person shuts you down, you expect everyone else to, so I feel like that could be improved upon."
-Participant from Students of Color Group

"If you suffer, like, mentally from the pandemic, it's not just going to heal those two semesters, and they have long-term effects on how you're performing, how you're feeling, and stuff like that."

"I think it would be beneficial if professors and departments were evaluated specifically on these types of things. I know there's evaluations for their classes on their performance, but I think the interactions they have with students specifically need to be monitored and investigated and assessed to see if they're being supportive because students are why the university's here and if we're not functioning, and we're not getting the support we need from those professors in departments then something's clearly wrong."
-Student from Resident Assistants Group

3. STUDENT COUNSELING SERVICES

Participants voiced that Student Counseling Services has very long wait times to be seen by a counselor. Limited accessibility to counselors makes it difficult for students to address their issues promptly. Participants explained that students are limited to the short-term counseling model and do not have the option of long-term services, which causes stress and anxiety when they must seek counseling through outside services and establish a relationship with a new provider. Participants reported the need for more diverse counselors that can relate to students with different identities.

"Mental health, I feel like it is a stigma still people just don't think that it's real. And it for sure is. I have days where I'm like this; there needs to be constant support just for everybody and all their needs, and especially their mental health. If we could have enough counselors and enough psychiatrists to get on top of it before it gets too bad, then I think that would be beneficial for everyone. Like prevention, prevent it from getting so bad." -Participant from Students with Disabilities Group

"There needs to be constant support just for everybody and all their needs, and especially their mental health."

"There are good resources, but we just need more people. We need more diverse counselors; we need more appointments; we need more options. And it's part of the reason why I stopped seeing counselors. It was difficult for me to continue to see the counselor at times when I needed to. I think that by simply having more counselors will make a big difference." -Student from Miscellaneous Group

POWER-BASED PERSONAL VIOLENCE

Students most frequently named the campus climate around sexual violence, the high frequency of sexual assault timely warning emails, and the lack of campus transportation as negative impacts to their wellbeing related to power-based personal violence.

1. SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Participants described how sexual violence negatively impacts individuals academically, socially, and professionally. Participants voiced that power-based personal violence can negatively affect individuals for the rest of their lives. Feeling unsafe can have a negative impact on performance and mental health in the campus community.

"I would say that sexual violence can be incredibly traumatic... [to the point] where you have to drop out. It can potentially wreck your whole years. Years where you're trying to work through these things. I do think it affects you on all these levels and especially when a lot of this power-based violence is from peers, or it is from like, people who you know, or who you are supposed to be working with or around and things like that. So, it makes a lot of it harder to not only just focus, but to also, well, just frankly, not be scared or not be constantly on guard. It just adds to stress levels, and it's like with the power-based violence, it can really make it just truly just hostile and make it, as I said, on the worst and where you're not able to actually function properly in any of these regards." -Student from Miscellaneous Group

"It makes a lot of it harder to not only just focus, but to also, well, just frankly, not be scared or not be constantly on guard. It just adds to stress levels."

"I think that the effects that power-based personal violence can have on a student's experiences just the feeling of not being valued. I think that plays a big role in a student's idea of whether or not they can see themselves graduating. I think from what I've heard from other students, with sexual violence or domestic violence like having the people around you not respect or value you can really affect how you see yourself, and I think affect how you may see yourself in a social setting and also in academia too." -Participant from Students of Color Group

2. SEXUAL ASSAULT EMAILS

Participants reported that the frequency of sexual assault emails they receive is alarming. Participants would like to see follow-through with prevention measures. They explained that the emails do not provide any information or follow-up about what has happened with the perpetrator, which increases students' levels of fear and anxiety and fear of reporting. Students felt that providing more training, awareness, and resources to the campus community would aid in making students feel safer.

"I definitely feel like there's been a significant increase in the amount of sexual assault emails we have gotten recently. I feel like that's a very large problem on campus right now." -Student from Miscellaneous Group

"I feel like that's a very large problem on campus right now."

"I feel like there was a time where every other day, I would get the notification of oh, this sexual assault happened. It feels like it's happening so often. I don't know how the university is actually doing anything other than telling us that it's happening. And then I feel like if people are victims, why would they even try to pursue the police in a sense, because what are they doing? Like, I don't know. So, I guess it's not good." -Participant from Students of Color Group

3. CAMPUS TRANSPORTATION

Students reported that the campus SafeRide transportation has long wait times and limited geographical location access. Participants reported that this leaves students with having to walk home at night. Participants said that SafeRide has limited routes causing a lack of accessibility and safety at night. Students also indicated that having more well-lit areas on campus would help them feel safer at night.

"It actually took like, over an hour and a half for [SafeRide] to get to me. I know that a lot of people may be requesting SafeRides. But even having like, I don't know, an estimated ETA on the app would be helpful so that I can find a different location instead of just waiting outside, because that's what I had to do. At that point, it was like I might as well just walked home and took the risk instead of waiting so long in this dark space outside." -Participant from Students of Color Group

"I've used SafeRide before and it's sometimes convenient, but definitely the waiting times are sometimes very long."

"I've used Safe Ride before and it's sometimes convenient, but definitely the waiting times are sometimes very long."

Something else that I experienced with that was the fact that they're very restrictive about the locations they drop you off. One time, they were like, oh, this isn't considered campus anymore. So, we have to drop you off here. And I had to walk maybe like 15 to 20 minutes, and it was like maybe 10 pm. Maybe a little bit later than that. It was just kind of like a little bit scary, but I also do kind of understand if it's not on campus. If they were like a little bit more open to more locations that would be great." -Participant from Students of Color Group

SUBSTANCE USE

Students most frequently named excessive substance use and not enough education/prevention as negative impacts to their wellbeing.

1. SUBSTANCES

Participants reported that alcohol, nicotine, and marijuana use are widely normalized on campus. This normalization leads to increased peer pressure among students. Participants believe that offering students more dry activities (events that do not involve alcohol) would be beneficial.

"I think peer pressure plays a huge part, at like, student life here at Iowa State because, as it was mentioned, bars are a huge social outlet for people, even if you might just want to stay home and hang out with friends. But if all your friends are going to the bar, how are you going to see them if you're not there? So, the peer pressure to go out. And I mean, just having to do that even to see your friends can affect basically all three of those things. Because, I don't know, just the fear of missing out can play a huge part." -Participant from LGBTQ+ Students Group

"I feel like a lot of people consider alcohol part of the college experience."

"I'd say that there's kind of more of a positive attitude towards alcohol, marijuana, and nicotine use, I would say. I feel like a lot of people consider alcohol part of like the college experience, which I mean, that's not true for everyone. But it does seem like that is a big deal." -Student from Miscellaneous Group

2. EDUCATION AND PREVENTION

Providing more education, awareness, and prevention of substance use campus-wide was mentioned frequently in this section. Participants said having support groups (Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous etc.) for students who have or are currently experiencing substance use could greatly benefit them. Participants also believe that educating the campus community about the harmful impact substances can cause would aid in prevention and responsible drinking measures.

"I think generally just more communication about substance use and the negative effects of it. There are so many physical, long-term, and acute effects of alcohol use and drug use that it's so normalized that it's not discussed as much. I think maybe more education on those things, and how it can affect your academics." -Participant from Transfer Students Group

"There are so many physical, long term, and acute effects of alcohol use and drug use."

"I'm not sure since I've been here, I have heard any such programs, where if you are having problems with substance abuse or alcoholism to go seek out these different resources. I don't think it's readily available to students, whether undergrad or graduate students to know where they can go." -Participant from Graduate and Professional Students Group



LIMITATIONS

Below are limitations that should be considered when interpreting this data:

- **Online vs In Person** — The majority of the current focus groups were held online via Zoom; participants may have been less likely to provide critical feedback on these topics as a result of the virtual format.
- **Selection Bias** — Students who were interested in participating volunteered to be in the study. Participants who chose to engage in the study may share traits that set them apart from non-participants from the start. When working with a nonrandom subset of the population, the possibility of sample selection bias exists.
- **Generalizability** — The study utilized a qualitative approach and therefore, results are specific to respondents. However, insights can be drawn to apply what was learned to the broader student population.

DISCUSSION

These findings demonstrate various ways students' health and wellbeing are impacted on the Iowa State University campus. Participants described their collegiate experiences as being shaped by their overall health and wellbeing, mental health, and experiences with power-based personal violence on campus. These included:

- Lack of access to affordable, nourishing, and culturally representative foods on campus and other basic need support
- Limited access to appointments through counseling services and lack of multicultural staff
- Lack of faculty awareness about student mental health and about support regarding mental health
- Lack of time management skills that negatively affects sleep
- High stigma about mental health among peers that creates barriers to seeking help
- Limited resources and campus communication regarding power-based personal violence and safety
- Lack of substance use awareness and education

Students demonstrated a wide range of perspectives and experiences regarding their wellbeing. For example, some participants did not correlate the described obstacles and challenges to their wellbeing on campus to the events mentioned while others did. Participants gave suggestions for improving the issue areas mentioned and their overall wellbeing on campus.

These findings indicate several approaches that Iowa State University can utilize to improve the health and wellbeing of all students. The next section discusses possible modifications to health and wellness services, academic environments, and campus life, as well as recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR GENERAL WELLBEING AND BASIC NEEDS

- 1. Expand access to basic need support including affordable, nourishing, and culturally representative foods and, basic need products in campus food pantries and other basic need availability services**
Students expressed the need for affordable food on campus and in the dining halls. Many participants cannot find affordable, nourishing, or culturally-representative on-campus options in on campus options, including food pantry and food availability services.. To address this, we recommend expanding the GiveASwipe program, expanding campus food pantry options and availability, and providing more options for students with dietary restrictions or preferences across campus and in all dining halls.
- 2. Adopt a university wide communication plan to expand education and awareness of available wellbeing services to students**
The Iowa State community needs to expand the ways and means through which student wellbeing and available resources are promoted. Students discussed that having continued support from faculty and staff along with keeping students informed of campus resources will positively contribute to their health and wellbeing. Students stated that they were unaware of certain services, were unsure if an opportunity was designed for them, or discovered services late in their Iowa State career. Participants proposed that the university develop new marketing tactics instead of overwhelming them with emails that make it difficult to know what resources are available.
- 3. Adopt strategies to create a sleep promoting environment, including access to education and services to improve student sleep**
Students expressed challenges with getting good sleep that affected their personal life, academics, and work. Many participants struggled to balance all their demands with getting good sleep. To address this, we recommend taking a comprehensive approach to sleep promotion, including increased education, implementing sleep promoting polices, and other sleep promoting strategies across campus.

FOR MENTAL HEALTH

- 1. Improve multicultural representation in counseling services and other mental health and wellbeing services**
Students cited a need for multicultural and diverse counselors knowledgeable of cultural influences. The university should continue to invest in recruiting and retaining multicultural and other diverse staff to improve representation.
- 2. Increase funding to Student Counseling Services to improve access to counseling appointments available to students, including adopting an embedded counselor model across all academic colleges and expanding telehealth appointment options available for students**
Students voiced the need to schedule appointments when experiencing immediate crises or needing a campus counselor but being unable to do so due to the limited availability of appointments. In addition, the campus should explore ways to expand services by adjusting hours, increasing telehealth opportunities, and investing in embedded counselor models.
- 3. Increase faculty and staff knowledge through expanded education about supporting student mental health**
Students expressed that having open communication with faculty about health and wellbeing and students feeling supported by faculty would contribute to their success at Iowa State. Faculty and staff should be encouraged and empowered to complete available programming to enhance their ability to support student health and wellbeing. This programming should at a minimum include Cyclone Support core training as well as QPR suicide prevention training.
- 4. Adopt strategies to strengthen open communication about wellbeing among faculty and their students**
Faculty and staff might think about where and how to provide flexibility in the classroom to promote student wellbeing in times of crisis proactively. Students discussed health issues such as required attendance, inability to miss class due to illness or personal issues, and overall lack of support for students. Increased accessibility to academic materials, including access to recorded lectures and class materials online, would improve students' mental health and wellbeing.
- 5. Increase mental health promotion strategies and education for all students, including strategies that focus on reducing stigma and increasing help-seeking behaviors**
Students expressed the need for more efforts around mental health promotion and suicide prevention. Iowa State should focus on creating a comprehensive mental health promotion plan that embeds proactive strategies across the university to improve mental health promotion.

FOR POWER-BASED PERSONAL VIOLENCE

1. **Expand prevention efforts and provide proactive communication to students regarding sexual assault emails and opt out options**

Students expressed that the frequency of sexual assault emails is alarming. Expanding prevention efforts on campus through continued implementation of resources such as the Green Dot program will assist in lowering the prevalence of sexual assault and power-based personal violence. Additionally, providing proactive messaging to students regarding the meaning of timely sexual assault warnings, expected follow-up and limitations of what can and cannot be shared, as well as opt out options would reduce anxiety and promote safety on campus and within the Ames community.

2. **Expand SafeRide geographical routes and increase program funding to improve access and decrease wait times**

Participants voiced that a barrier to their safety was the long wait times for SafeRide transportation on campus. Participants expressed that the expansion of routes would assist them in not having to walk long distances at night and would allow students to feel safer.

FOR SUBSTANCE USE

1. **Enhance promotion to raise awareness of existing support groups and resources for students who struggle with substance use**

Participants voiced that having supportive services (e.g., NA, AA) for students in recovery or experiencing substance use would benefit the campus community. Many of these services currently exist but promotion of such resources should be expanded to increase students' awareness and ability to access them.

2. **Increase funding to provide more fun, dry activities (alcohol-free) on campus during evenings/weekends**

Participants stated that the consumption of alcohol, nicotine, and marijuana is normalized by students, leading to them feeling peer pressure to engage in such activities. Students would like to see more activities offered on campus that are alternatives to drinking or using other substances.

A more detailed breakdown of key points and recommendations from each identity group can be found in Appendix A.

CONCLUSION

Numerous suggestions were made for future programming and service enhancements to improve students' health and wellbeing at Iowa State University. There are some resources participants cite that they would like to see that Iowa State already has in place. This indicates a broad lack of awareness about the campus's many resources. Marketing and promotion of how students can access campus resources and supportive services must be improved and enhanced.

Several recommendations have been outlined for advancing the campus climate and supporting student wellbeing. Participants suggested various ideas for the campus community to foster a healthy culture. Students indicated that a healthy campus focuses on addressing mental health stigma and ensuring increased access to mental health resources. Long wait times and restricted sessions should be addressed, as well as education and awareness about services. Participants noted that leadership involvement is essential in modeling health.

Balancing school and managing time involves support from faculty through open communication, accessibility, and flexibility of academic work. They also said that faculty should participate in training on creating healthy environments. Participants proposed that a healthy campus should prioritize improved access to student health services for all students. Participants suggested an increased focus on affordable, nourishing, and culturally representative food options on campus.

They also recommended that more emphasis be placed on wellness and prevention, including information on substance use and power-based personal violence. With the continued support of the campus community, meeting students' needs must remain a priority. These findings will directly influence the University's strategy and implementation of programs to promote, support, and improve the overall health and wellbeing of our campus community.

APPENDIX A: KEY POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY IDENTITY GROUP

STUDENTS OF COLOR

- Resources do not cater to the needs of BIPOC* (Black, Indigenous, and people of color).
- Climate on campus could be better at supporting students who experience microaggressions.
- There is a need for diverse counselors .

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

- There is a need for more therapists and specialized diverse therapy.
- Students should receive more resources on health and wellbeing during orientation.
- Stipends should be increased (International students are unable to work outside of school).

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

- Professors need more education on disabilities and how they affect students.
- Having to fill out a form for a disability to be acknowledged is a barrier. The application is not suitable for each disability.
- There needs to be more supportive health care workers, including multi-cultural counselors.

LGBTQ+ STUDENTS

- Members of the LGBTQ+ community are often viewed differently and unequally.
- The LGBTQ+ students who are unsure of their identities do not get as many resources as those who are sure of their identities.
- Signs around campus that support the LGBTQ+ community would be helpful.

STUDENT VETERANS

- Paid parking at gyms is difficult because it can limit when people are able to go to the gym.
- PTSD is difficult to manage while still having to deal with academics.
- Students should be allowed to carry self-defense tools on campus.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS

- “Free speech” groups make it feel unsafe (i.e., location outside of Parks library where groups often gather).
- Need more advertisement for the Hixson scholar program.
- TRIO has been very helpful when trying to find one’s place as a first-generation college student.

FINANCIALLY INSECURE STUDENTS

- More scholarships/stipends would be helpful in dealing with financial insecurity.
- There is a need for free student parking to access Recreational Services facilities.
- There needs to be increased awareness about certain programs for incoming students.

GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

- Graduate students feel they are not taken seriously (student identity vs. professional identity) .
- Most programs are suited toward new students; some programs should be tailored for graduate/professional students.
- There should be clear and consistent expectations of work hours within departments.

TRANSFER STUDENTS

- Providing a booklet of resources at orientation would be helpful.
- ISU website is not easy to use (not user-friendly and has too much information).
- Student Counseling Services should host events on campus promoting their services and helping to decrease the stigma around seeking mental health support.

NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

- There is a need for improved access to childcare and more resources on campus.
- There is a need for diverse counselors.
- More support is needed for students with children.

RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND AFFILIATION (IF ANY)

Christian Students

- Iowa State reaches out to non-campus resources if they cannot accommodate with what they have available on campus.
- More animal programs for mental health.
- More outdoor programs for mental health.

Non-Christian Students

- Free speech/speakers need to be aware of any discriminatory statements.
- More psychiatrists needed.
- Announcing things such as “Happy Ramadan” would show the university respects other religions and would transfer into the attitudes of students.

RESIDENT ASSISTANTS

- There needs to be one centralized location where all resources can be found.
- Accessibility of resources to residents should be improved.
- The Department of Residence should develop programs with clear action steps to address or prevent mental health crises (prevention) rather than focusing on reacting to situations once they’ve already happened.

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

GENERAL WELLBEING AND BASIC NEEDS (30 MIN)

Let's begin by discussing a few general aspects of culture and communications related to health and wellbeing on campus.

1. What does a healthy campus mean and look like to you?
2. Do you feel the current campus climate is supportive to your health and wellbeing needs? Why or why not?
3. Would you say you have access to meet your basic needs while studying at ISU?
 - a. Nourishing & culturally representative food
 - b. Clothing, (particularly winter clothing)
 - c. Shelter (ability to pay rent/utilities)
 - d. If not, what are some of the barriers keeping you (and your peers) from consuming nourishing foods, paying for rent/utilities, etc.?
4. Do you feel you (and your peers) get enough sleep? Why or why not?
5. One of the university's priorities is to enhance or develop programs, services, and resources that will benefit Iowa State students. Which, if any, programs, services, or resources have been beneficial to your basic needs (like clothing, food, shelter, and sleep) since starting college?
6. What obstacles or causes, if any, have kept you (or your peers) from using campus programs, services, and resources to help with these issues?
 - a. What obstacles or causes, if any, have kept you (or your peers) from using campus programs, services, and resources to help with these issues?
 - b. How do you believe _____ (insert identity category) has influenced your (or your peers) utilization of campus programs, services, and resources, if at all?
7. How important are basic needs (like food, clothing, shelter, and sleep) to your success as a student at ISU? (Academically, personally, etc.)

MENTAL HEALTH (20 MIN)

Thank you for sharing your perspectives on the overall health and wellbeing on campus. Next, we will talk about your perceptions on mental health and the campus climate.

1. How would you describe the current climate around mental health for students at ISU?
 - a. What are some of the most difficult aspects of college for students?
 - b. What are some of the most stressful situations you have experienced?
2. How does mental health affect your (or your peers') experience at ISU?
 - a. academically (What is the impact on learning & engagement?)
 - b. personally (What is the impact socially, etc.?)
 - c. professionally (What is impact on job/career?)
3. One of the university's priorities is to enhance or develop programs, services, and resources that will benefit Iowa State students. Which, if any, programs, services, or resources have been beneficial to your mental health since starting college?
 - a. What obstacles or causes, if any, have kept you (or your peers) from using campus programs, services, and resources?
 - b. How do you believe _____ (insert identity category) has influenced your (or your peers) utilization of campus programs, services, and resources, if at all?
4. What recommendations do you have for the university to enhance support for students around mental health, especially for _____ (insert identity category)
 - a. prevention
 - b. intervention/treatment
5. How important are these topics to your success as a student at ISU? (Academically, personally, etc.)

SUBSTANCE USE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE (30 MIN)

Next, we are going to talk about issues such as safety, and power-based personal violence. For power based personal violence, that can include acts of violence like sexual violence (like sexual assault, rape, stalking, and dating violence), bullying, harassment, cyberbullying, microaggressions, and discrimination.

We are not asking you to disclose personal experiences. Rather, we are looking for your overall impressions on the topics.

Privacy Notice: Please note, discussions with Student Wellness staff during student focus groups will be considered private and will not be disclosed without your permission, or as otherwise allowed by applicable law. PLEASE NOTE, Student Wellness staff are considered Responsible Employees under ISU's Title IX Policy. Accordingly, they have a responsibility to report information brought to their attention regarding incidents of Prohibited Title IX Sexual Harassment to the Title IX Coordinator. If you have any questions or concerns about this reporting responsibility, please do not hesitate to ask.

First, I'd like to talk about power-based personal violence. Then we will chat about substance use.

1. How would you describe the current campus climate around power-based personal violence? (e.g. sexual violence, bullying, harassment, discrimination, microaggressions, etc.)
 - a. How safe do you (and your peers) feel on campus? In the Ames community?
2. How does power based personal violence affect student's experiences at ISU?
 - a. Academically (What is the impact on learning & engagement?)
 - b. Personally (What is the impact socially, etc.?)
 - c. Professionally (What is impact on job/career?)
3. What obstacles or causes (barriers), if any, have kept you (or your peers) from using campus programs, services, and resources regarding power-based personal violence and safety?
 - a. How do you believe _____ (insert identity category) has influenced your (or your peers) utilization of campus programs, services, and resources, if at all?
4. What recommendations do you have for the university to enhance support for students around power-based personal violence, especially for _____ (insert identity category)
5. How would you describe the current climate around substance use for students at ISU?
 - a. What are the general attitudes around alcohol/drug use? Are there some drugs that are more accepted than others?
6. How does substance use affect student's experiences at ISU?
 - a. academically (What is the impact on learning & engagement?)
 - b. personally (What is the impact socially, etc.?)
 - c. professionally (What is impact on job/career?)
7. What recommendations do you have for the university to enhance support for students around substance use, especially for (insert identity category)
 - a. prevention
 - b. intervention/treatment
8. How important are these topics to your success as a student at ISU? (Academically, personally, etc.)

ENDING QUESTION (5 MIN)

Is there anything else you would like us to know about your student experience, or what would be helpful to your health and wellbeing while on campus that I didn't ask or that you have not yet shared?

CLOSING COMMENTS (5 MIN)

Thank you for taking the time to attend this focus group meeting. You've all brought forward some excellent points for us to examine. We'll consider what you've said and use it to develop recommendations for improving the general health and wellbeing of students.