**UConn CSCH Podcast Episode**

**Feeling Well: The Science and Practice of Emotional Well Being**

Helene Marcy: Hello and Welcome to the CSCH Podcast. My name is Helene Marcy, Director of Programs & Communications at the UConn Collaboratory on School and Child Health, or CSCH. The CSCH mission is to facilitate innovative and impactful connections across research, policy, and practice arenas to advance equity in school and child health. CSCH is committed to anti-racist work that prioritizes inclusion, reduces disparities, and creates systemic change. I invite you to take a look at our website at csch.uconn.edu.

Today we have an interesting conversation for you. Amy Gorin, Vice Provost for Health Sciences and Interdisciplinary Initiatives at UConn, is going to talk to the leads of a new pop-up course at UConn called Feeling Well: The Science and Practice of Emotional Well Being. The three UConn staff and faculty are Sandy Chafouleas, Karen McComb, and Beth Russell. Sandy is a Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor in UConn’s Department of Educational Psychology at UConn and is Co-Director of our own Collaboratory on School and Child Health. Karen McComb, is Director of Health Promotion and Community Impact at UConn Student Health and Wellness. And Beth Russell is Associate Professor in UConn’s Department of Human Development and Family Sciences, Director of the Center for Applied Research in Human Development, and the other Co-Director of CSCH. Here is Amy Gorin.

Amy Gorin: Welcome, everyone.

Sandy Chafouleas**:** Hi! Thanks for having us.

Karen McComb: Hi!

Beth Russell: indeed! Thank you. Thank you. Great to see everyone.

Amy G: Thanks for being here today. I’m really excited to learn about this pop-up course on emotional well-being. What does it cover and how did it come about?

Sandy C: So that's a really great question, and it extends certainly much longer than the semester in which we created it. You know. As we know, the University of Connecticut's had a strong emphasis on student mental health and well-being for quite a few years. The culmination came from the President's task force on student mental health and some of the recommendations that came out of that and the great work that Karen’s office has been doing. So it just was a natural reason to have a pop-up course on emotional well-being and kind of taking what we know about the science and the practice, and putting that all together into a pop-up that could be really exciting, cause it can be hard to figure it all out.

Some people might be asking, Well, why is emotional well-being a topic in and of itself that we should care about in larger society? It's a really interesting question and one that lots of federal agencies and researchers have been involved in, particularly in the past couple of decades, as more research and more evidence comes out to show that kind of happy people or people that demonstrate characteristics of emotional well-being have better outcomes. There are associations that suggest things like people participate in more activities than less happy people, that they're more likely to say they're healthier, to score higher on measures of creativity. So healthy behavior, high immune functioning, pro-social behaviors, all the good things that we want to see in a well society, are connected to this concept of emotional well-being and why we need to be diving in to do more study and more investigations to understand how do we best enable our society–the individuals within our society and our society as a whole—to be able to harness emotional well-being as an important predictor/correlate/association with all the other things that we want to see in a healthy society.

These questions and more are being answered by lots of different agencies. So for example, I'm part of the M3EWB network at UConn, which is one of six funded centers by the NIH that is designed to advance the science of emotional well-being. So across the six networks, there are lots of researchers from different backgrounds, each tackling different aspects of what does it mean to be emotionally well, either in aging or in children in everyday life in response to different types of mechanism, mechanistic research and in response to different types of interventions, lots of different ways that that this topic of emotional well-being is being tackled.

In terms of what the course covers, really it covers a large gamut of what we mean by emotional well-being. and what does it mean to to study the science and practice. You know, we start in the beginning of the pop-up with this idea of defining emotional well-being. What are the components to it? Are we all talking about the same thing? And then it moves into a little bit of understanding how the brain and body are connected in emotional well-being. Then we move in more to the practices, like what are the effective practices that can enhance our emotional well-being and how are they connected across individuals, communities, and systems? Because there is an intertwining where it's not just about the individual, but it's about—we often ask students throughout the course to reflect on for yourself and those around you—in taking the concepts that are learned and push them forward.

Karen, do you have anything else you want to add?

Karen M: we really look at the context, as well, with students. So we talk, we have our psychological sciences and disciplines and then we also have our sociology and and human and family systems sciences as well. So really, looking at the different layers of our experience, and how we both influence and are influenced by those contexts when it comes to our emotional well-being.

Amy G: So true. So tell me, why make this a pop-up course as opposed to a regular course within a single department.

Beth R: So our regular courses are meant to provide a lot of disciplinary depth, and as Sandy just described, emotional well-being is a domain that doesn't belong in just one discipline. In fact, there are rich, multi-disciplinary perspectives on emotional well-being. And that meant that part of what we felt UConn could tackle particularly well here would be bringing together disciplines. So first, there was this commitment to interdisciplinarity that I think is really important, and the second is the timely nature of what can be accomplished through a pop-up class.

The topics for pop-up classes are intended to be appealing to larger audiences. They're responsive to things that are going on in the world around us that require a multi-disciplinary perspective. So in this case we were a very interdisciplinary team trying to talk about emotional well-being. But if you look back at the beginnings of pop-up courses here at UConn our first one was on COVID-19—surely a timely topic requiring a lot of input from many different units. So pop-up courses are online and they cover seven weeks of content rather than 15 or 16 in a traditional semester, and they are intended to be broadly consumed, not just by a single discipline's students, but by many disciplines, all disciplines, in fact, potentially all community members.

Pop-up classes are shorter in duration, and therefore can be built a little bit quicker than a full semester course. They are also one credit instead of three credits, again lending itself to a sort of efficiency in responding to a timely topic, like we might envision was the case when we started thinking about how to continue to promote student well-being on the other side of the COVID-19 pandemic. So it allowed us a multidisciplinary perspective and an agility that was really well suited to the target audience, which, at least in its inception was really the incoming early career students here at UConn.

Amy G: So this course really pulls on expertise from across our campus and is interdisciplinary in nature. Can you tell us about who's involved?

Karen M: We had an amazing group of fourteen contributing faculty and staff. We were from educational psychology, human development and family sciences, psychological sciences, sociology, and the department of student health and wellness. And not only was it interdisciplinary from an academic discipline and practitioner focus, but we were also diverse from a geography and lived experience perspective. So we had faculty and staff that not were not only based in Storrs, but also taught in Waterbury and Avery Point. And then again, that life experience that everybody brought to the table really enriched the content and the discussion about emotional well-being. So, in addition to the wonderful group of contributing faculty and staff, we also had Dr. Jessica Koslouski from Educational Psychology who served as a student engagement facilitator, so she helped students navigate the course content. And then we couldn't have done this without the time and talent of our wonderful colleagues in CETL. So from Peter Diplock, who helped us navigate the beginning stages of getting course approvals to Eileen Stuyniski, Simon Wang, David Morrow, Betsy Guala, and Heather Breittholz, who took all of this content and turned it into a really engaging learning experience for our students. They also really kept us on track, which we appreciated throughout this project as well. So it was really an amazing collaboration.

Amy G: sounds like a full team effort there. Developing any new course, especially one on a tight time frame, is a heavy lift. What was it like to plan and develop a course with so many collaborators?

Sandy C: Oh, my goodness! So can we just say it was also exciting and challenging at the same time. So Karen just talked about a long list of collaborators that are so exciting to be part of learning how do you think about emotional well-being from your discipline and your research and your expertise. And how do we put together a course that melds together that expertise in a way that makes it highly accessible to give that, you know, one credit overview of what we’re talking about when we say emotional well-being. It could be even just starting with what do we each mean by emotional well-being, which we have defined in this course as the emotional quality of how you’re feeling in everyday moments, but also your judgments, your reflections about life satisfaction, meaning, and goal pursuit. That's a whole lot of things. And then we take both the individual way of thinking about that, and then the collective way of the interdependence, looking at the interdependence across communities, individuals and systems. So, exciting, but very challenging, at least on our perspective, as the leads, in getting everybody to a place where we could move forward initially, and then just see the exploration explode.

Beth R: I think I would add that the structure provided by our CETL team—our Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning—was really important for giving us a structure that we could all fall into. So whenever you pull together a multidisciplinary team, you can spend a lot of time talking about the products that you're gonna collaborate on together. And when you're teaching, those products need to feel pretty seamless. So quizzes and, you know, how video content is presented, what readings look like and how much time and space they require of students to complete. It was really nice to have someone outside the content coming together for the course, to help make sure that we were being consistent across each of the modules that this very large group of collaborators were ultimately responsible for producing a coherent course through.

Sandy C: Yeah, really helping us calibrate is the word that I guess I would use right, because I personally have not taught a one-credit course before, and most of my teaching is a graduate space. Karen does a lot of dissemination and outreach and different stuff, but hasn't necessarily taught within the syllabus structure before. So it was just really great to have that structure as we navigated figuring out what we wanted to share that could again balance this idea between science and practice. Make it meaningful for people in their everyday lives, but understand the theory and the science behind what we're talking about.

Karen M: I just think it was also amazing that the the framework for the content of the course came from a a collaboration of researchers that Sandy that was a part of as well. So being able to start with that collaboration around a working definition of emotional well-being, and then carry that forward into a broader collaboration of faculty and staff across Storrs. It just really talks about what the spirit is around this concept.

Beth R: Yeah, I guess the only other point I was going to add is about infrastructure. So this is a pop-up course that’s delivered online. And for a lot of instructors learning how to use that technology to deliver what I would sort of call a student engaging experience is a skill set in and of itself. And so, having again, the CETL team help translate many of our in-person successful strategies to online successful strategies was really a great learning experience, and also very reassuring.

Sandy C: And how do you offer the extension activities? Because when we talk about emotional well-being practice, that means kind of you have to do something, right, like you should be doing something, the practice of emotional well-being. But how do you deliver that, and evaluate that within a one credit course was certainly a challenge. I know that Karen's group had experienced those ending modules in terms of offering the extension activities and things that you could learn in a quick bite, but then have something to take with you later on. How do I access other resources? Where do I look for other materials if I want to follow up on this particular strategy.

Amy G: it sounds like a true team effort to pull this together. I understand the course is finishing up its first run right now. How's that been going? Any early feedback from students?

Sandy C: I think it's actually finished as of this week, even. So, yeah, super exciting. I think in our first run we had over 940, or about 940 students from across campuses and spaces enrolled at both undergraduate and graduate levels. You know, the small hiccups on the way when you first start launching an online course. But overall, we've seen very positive feedback from folks that have been interested in the content or taken away certain messages. So much so that I believe we're already scheduled to run in the first half of the spring semester.

Amy G: So what's next? You've had a lot of interest in this course. It sounds like you'll be offering it again in the spring. Have any other ideas for future collaborations come out of putting this course together?

Beth R: One of the things that we're hoping this course will lead to is expanding the audience, not just to university students, as Sandy mentioned at the undergraduate and graduate level, but potentially the staff and broader community here at UConn, and then maybe beyond the university's borders to the Connecticut community writ large and perhaps beyond. That will mean going back and retooling some of the work just a little bit, so that we make sure we've got broad appeal. But we're excited to see what the appetite is for those evolutions in the course, and to tackle them, as the University has an appetite and motivation for us to do so.

Sandy C: and we’ve been able to, I think, to make some small steps toward that already, even in our first go, or our first run. Number one, by creating some of the materials through the Collaboratory on School and Child Health that are used in the course that are already publicly accessible on the website, digesting maybe more complex scientific articles into easily digestible single pagers or two pager types of information is a great start at that. Karen's team has also done an excellent job trying to catalogue more systematically, I guess, the resources that we have or harness the resources that are already available for folks in different spaces across the State. I don't know, Karen, if you want to add to that.

Karen M: I think it's just a really great glimpse of how your well-being is dependent upon your context, right? And so that's the same case at UConn as well. So, being able to look at what resources are available on each campus. And where, where can students explore these practices more was an amazing insight for me, especially as we're looking to build a community across all of the campuses where we can tap into well-being, no matter where we are studying or learning or teaching or researching

Amy G: Great conversation, everyone, on such a timely and important topic that really is relevant to all of us.

Thank you, Sandy, Beth, and Karen, for your work. It truly represents the best of what we can do at a university when we work across our disciplinary silos. Thanks to everyone for joining.

Karen M: Thank you.

Sandy C: Thank you.

Beth R: Yeah, thank you.

Helene M: We hope you enjoyed the discussion today. We’ll add links to resources, faculty pages and the emotional well-being course in the podcast description. You can find all our podcast episodes in your favorite podcast app by searching for UConnCSCH or by visiting the CSCH website, csch.uconn.edu. You can also follow us on social media @UConnCSCH. Thanks for listening.