

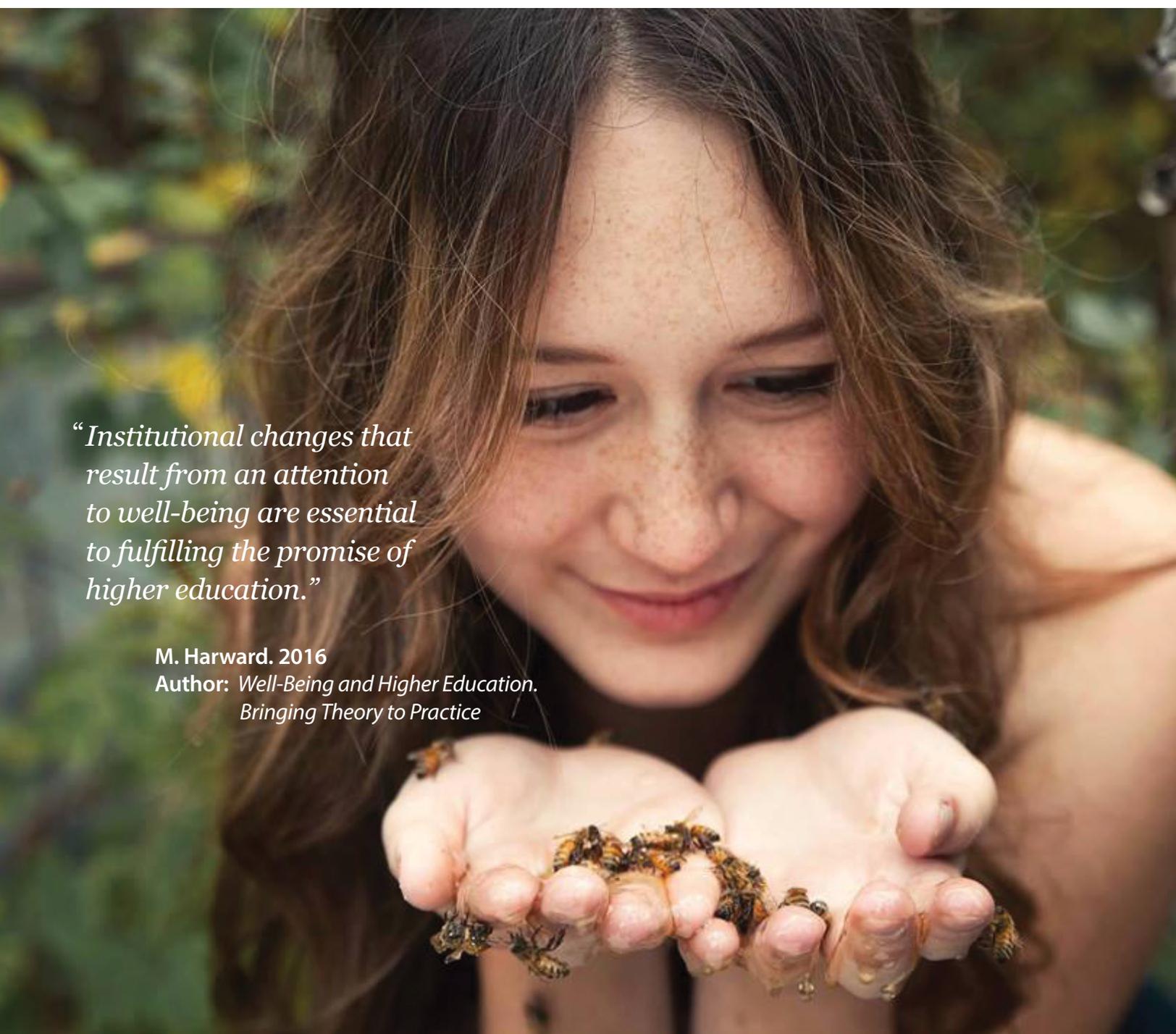
# Living Campus & Well-Being for All, Sustainably

DAWSON COLLEGE, MONTREAL, CANADA

*“Institutional changes that result from an attention to well-being are essential to fulfilling the promise of higher education.”*

M. Harward. 2016

Author: *Well-Being and Higher Education. Bringing Theory to Practice*



## Living Campus & Well-Being for All, Sustainably

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Dawson College, February, 2017

## Integrating the Principle of Well-Being, Sustainably

### What is well-being and why is it important to Dawson College?

There are many aspects of well-being and a variety of definitions exist in academic and policy literature. Seligman (2014), identifies well-being theory as having five major elements: positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and accomplishments. In addition, wellness as an extension of health also includes health of the natural environment, spirituality and physical health (Fahey et al, 2005). At Dawson College, we define well-being as having the following key components:

#### Components of Well-Being



There is a link between well-being and student success. Group experiences within high-impact teaching approaches add to a sense of belonging and group identification, contributing to student learning, retention and overall college success (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2006). When well-being is considered and supported, students, faculty and staff can achieve their full potential. By considering the whole person, we help our community of students, faculty and staff develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes they will need to succeed in life. The Dawson College [Graduate Profile](#) promotes this vision. A goal of the Dawson Strategic Plan is to be a leading employer dedicated to employee development and engagement.



“The well-being institution can be a context in which students, faculty, and the community flourish—they are parts of something greater, but they retain their identities as members of a partnership capable and critical, supportive and contrarian”

M. Harward - *Well-Being and Higher Education*, 2016, p.15

## Well-Being, Sustainability & the Strategic Plan

In 2016, Dawson College developed its third-generation [Strategic Plan](#). Consultation for the plan included feedback from an unprecedented number of 1600 students and 350 faculty and staff members. Themes that emerged from this consultation included: commitment to student success, dedication to employee engagement, inclusivity, sustainability and well-being for the entire community.

The 2016-2021 Strategic Plan highlights “well-being for all, sustainably” as a core value and a sustainability goal as a lens to promote opportunities to connect with Nature. Dawson’s Living Campus initiative was developed with well-being in mind and helps to operationalize it.

*We cultivate a healthy and inclusive learning and working environment in which all members of our community feel respected, valued and supported in the pursuit of their personal and professional goals. We aim to promote long-term health and well-being for all, sustainably*

Dawson College  
Core Value – Strategic Plan 2016-2021

## Well-Being, Nature & Living Campus



An ever-increasing body of evidence demonstrates that contact with Nature develops well-being and can also be an important part of transforming education. Naturalized areas have an impact on people’s mental state, mood and sense of security, which contribute to sociability (Kaplan, 1995). Connecting with Nature is associated with positive emotions and recognized as a significant restorative agent (Hernandez & Hidalgo, 2005, O’Brien & Adam 2016).

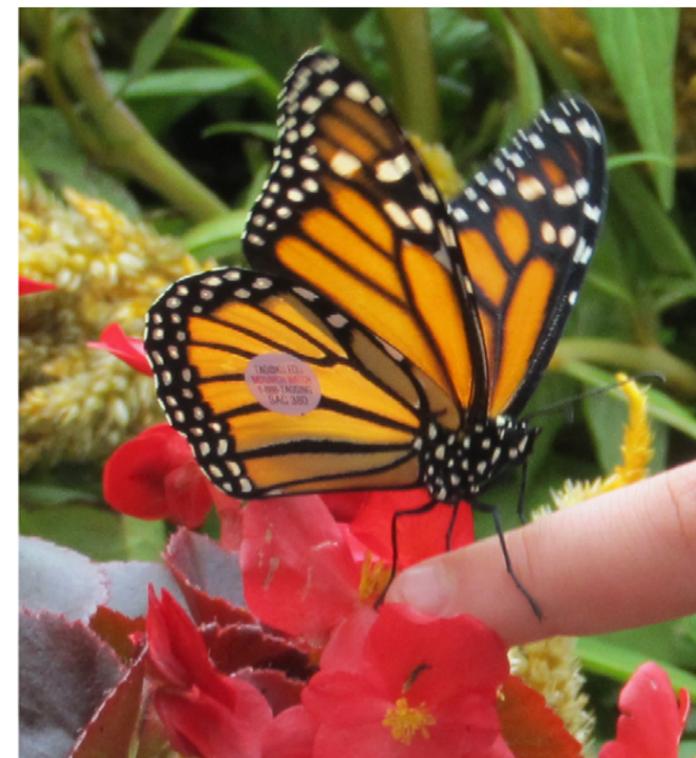
In fact, it has been demonstrated that Nature’s beneficial effects go beyond mere restoration by positively enhancing true mental health and well-being (Passmore 2011) and can help mitigate stress (Bagshaw, 2014).

[Living Campus](#) is a concept that integrates educational approaches under the vision of well-being for all, sustainably, and views the entire campus as a learning lab.

Its mandate of reconnecting people, community and Nature uses Nature as a catalyst to increase literacy and contribute to well-being. Research in this area is well represented within Dawson’s [Professional Development & Research](#) by its current SSHRC projects titled [Sustainable Campuses](#): A North South Research and Action Community and Food Justice and Sustainability.

Dawson College students, faculty and staff identified the following benefits as being directly linked to Living Campus: incubating hope, forging new relationships, fostering systems thinking, promoting sustainable healthy living, encouraging change-makers and choice-makers, and creating models for adaptation in other contexts (O’Brien & Adam, 2016). A study in the Journal of Health Psychology found what other researchers have also noted: connectedness to Nature (CN) and well-being (WB) are linked.

“In the present studies, distinct indicators of WB were found to be robustly correlated with CN, particularly meaningfulness. People high on CN scored high on vitality and on psychological WB too. Meaningfulness, in contrast to depression, is understood as a developmental motive, referring to a human’s need of being in the world and experiencing a sense of purpose in life. People scoring high on meaningfulness conceive their lives as fulfilling and relatively free from feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, fear and depression.” (Cervinka et al, 2011 p. 384)



“Reducing that deficit – healing the broken bond between our young and nature – is in our self-interest, not only because aesthetics or justice demands it, but also because our mental, physical, and spiritual health depends on it.”

Richard Louv, Author: *Last Child in the Woods*

“We should be just as concerned with making the lives of people fulfilling as we are with healing pathology...developing interventions that relieve misery are not the same as interventions that produce well-being”

M. Seligman, Author: *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being*, 2014, p.233

## Engaging Students, Faculty & Staff in Well-Being



*Millennials response to survey question:  
Having a job where I can make an impact on causes or  
issues that are important to me.*

*Essential 31%      Very important 41%*

Center for Workforce Development Rutgers University

Whether consciously or unconsciously, students come to school looking for more than just an academic education. They desire a sense of belonging, and without it may abandon their school or worse, their education (Brazzell, 2001). Belonging and caring are key themes when describing classrooms and paying attention to a student's feeling of belonging is linked to high academic achievement. Learning and well-being are connected. Where education has focused on learning to live, students want to live their learning.

An article on employee engagement by the [Harvard Business Review](#) states that millennials are "the most socially conscious generation since the 1960s" (Meister & Willyerd, 2010, p2). They just don't want work/life balance, they want to blend their life and work. Another study Zukin and Szeltner (2012) reported that job satisfaction increases when staff have opportunities to practice environmental sustainability, corporate social responsibility, or civic participation.

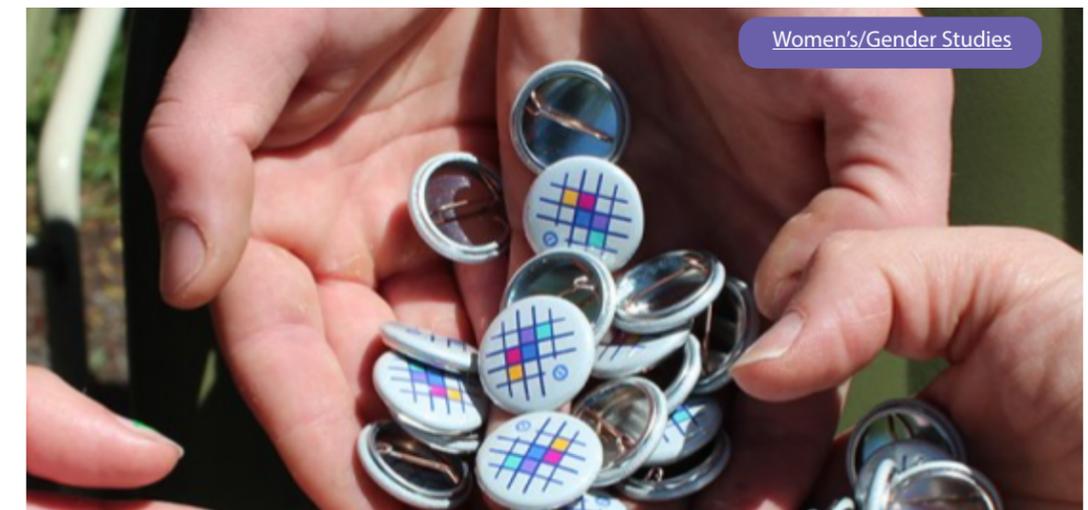
## The Challenge

An ongoing educational challenge is that disciplines can fragment knowledge and administrative structures can work in silos. Specialists focus on their own areas at the expense of connections to others, and rich extra and co-curricular projects consume much limited human and financial resources that can create stress through internal competitions. Projects also often originate and develop as a result of individual efforts and can "live or die" with the actions of one person. Institutionalizing high impact methods and authentic projects while linking them to Nature connectedness and sustainability is a common problem in institutes of higher education.

The College is rich in curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that bridge disciplines, leave ample room for linking feeling and knowing, and meet 21st century learning objectives that foster belonging. These projects include: [Active Learning](#), [SPACE](#), [Entrepreneurship](#), [Living Campus and Sustainability](#), [Model UN](#), [INSPIRE](#), [WID](#), [Peace Studies](#), [Women's/Gender Studies](#) and a host of [Centre for Training and Development](#), [College Life & Leadership](#) and [Dawson Student Union](#) activities are a significant pool of high-impact learning. Many, however, are dependent on individual staff commitment, yearly financial plans or the availability of grants and would benefit from formal curricular integration or more permanent organizational structures.

Providing continued professional development for staff as well as authentic and targeted high-impact learning opportunities for students can be achieved by redistributing or augmenting existing resources. A paradigm shift in thinking rarely occurs without a "rethink" of current practices.

The increased application of the Dawson Sustainability Policy, which states that "the College has a responsibility to act as an ecologically and socially responsible agent and advance academically the understanding, research on, and teaching of sustainability", will need attention. It is a key policy that affects well-being and Living Campus in promoting the development of restorative activities.





## Final Note

Dawson College as a Living Campus, and through its commitment to well-being for all, sustainably, departs from the most troublesome and dated components of traditional education and enters a transformative period that will help implement what the [UN Earth Charter](#) clearly states as one of its aspirations:

*“Let ours be a time for awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life”.*

Dawson is boldly attempting to be one of the leaders for educational change that many researchers write about, students hope for, and society needs to address 21st century issues.



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