

QEP Proposal Title: Well-being and Healing Justice

1. Project Abstract: This QEP proposal brings the co-curricular and academic components of Southwestern University together to focus on the well-being of the whole person (body, mind, and spirit) as part of the work of social justice. The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” The inner work of well-being is fundamentally connected to the outer work of cultivating social and political change for the common good. This QEP focuses on how embodied social change and healing justice can be articulated and amplified in our co-curricular engagements with students, in the classroom, and in the professional development of faculty. At this particular moment, we are in global and national states of emergency with respect to both health and politics: this QEP bridges work in both areas to enhance the connections between well-being and social justice by focusing on the whole person, situated in the social and political context.

2. QEP Project Student Learning Outcomes

- i. Empower students to become agents of change
- ii. Enable students to contextualize well-being within the framework of social justice
- iii. Educate and engage students with the interconnected resources on campus that exist to support well-being, embodied social change, and healing justice

3. QEP Project Description

Introduction. This QEP connects and centers the spaces on campus where well-being is already bridged with social justice work. This QEP links the co-curricular side of Southwestern’s support services with the work students do in their classes, while also providing more support and training for faculty to facilitate connections between well-being and social justice, such as more training in trauma-informed pedagogies, for example. On a social-justice oriented campus, students should see how the “inner work” of well-being connects with their activism and their academic work. The campus as a whole, inside and outside the classroom, should support those engagements.

Broader Historical Context. The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Therefore, the concept of well-being cannot be siloed to just physical or mental health. Accordingly, work on ‘Embodied Social Change’ and ‘Healing Justice’ begins from the starting point that unjust social and political systems cause embodied suffering and mental and physical trauma. Patriarchy and sexism cause suffering that is experienced in body, mind, and spirit.ⁱ Economic inequality and white supremacy both cause felt suffering. We are at a moment where we face several intertwined crises: a crisis of mental health, a pandemic, and a political moment where long-standing injustices are starkly illuminated. These are all connected. For example, we might understand racial injustice as the “pre-existing condition” of COVID-19, as the pandemic disproportionately affects Black and Latinx communities and other marginalized communities such as the incarcerated, the elderly, and low-income people.

Many of our academic disciplines help us see these systemic injustices and critically analyze them. But then how do students -- as well as faculty and staff -- cope with the suffering and pain that this vital critical knowledge can also generate or open up? For example, how do we study the ideological operations of white supremacy in ways that also hold space for various experiences of suffering? How can we name and bear witness to suffering in the classroom? How can we teach students to critique, cope, and creatively work to cultivate change? How can we amplify our faculty’s ability to meet people where they are and teach the whole person -- body, mind, and spirit -- in the classroom? How can all faculty strengthen their practice of anti-

oppression pedagogy?ⁱⁱ To the extent that we see well-being as “private” or “personal” and not political, we reinscribe divisions based on gender, race, class, and colonialism that have limited the ways we think about politics from the start. We are still working, in key ways, to learn the fundamental lesson that Audre Lorde communicated decades ago. In *Sister Outsider*, she wrote “political work will not save our souls, no matter how correct and necessary that work is. Yet it is true that without political work we cannot hope to survive long enough to effect any change. And self-empowerment is the most deeply political work there is, and the most difficult.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Embodied social change and healing justice start from the position that we need to combine inner work with outer work and that both are socially and politically important.^{iv} Inner work refers to the more spiritual, contemplative, and soul-searching side of work for social and political change. Inner work focuses on the personal side of politics, where experiences of self-empowerment, consciousness-raising, awareness and awakening are seen as constitutive of and inseparable from the outer work we might do in more conventional political spaces. Embodied work and contemplative practices are seen as a liberatory kind of micro-politics, a politics of the self that is also social, as politically valuable forms of self-cultivation and embodiment that change our way of being in the world, change how we relate to others, and change our social and political culture.

Practices that cultivate well-being and can represent modes of embodied social change take a wide variety of forms, ranging from meditation, mindfulness, yoga, and therapeutic work, as well as grounding and centering practices, but also circle processes, story-telling, and bearing witness. Artistic and aesthetic practices can also represent modes of embodied social change in cultivating attention, attunement, and empathy. These forms of work can be integrated into a range of spaces across campus, from classrooms, to formal and informal meetings, to individual and group activities, and for faculty, staff, and students.

This QEP forefronts practices that empower students to become agents of transformative change in their educational experience at SU and agents of change for the common good and social justice in their communities. Implementing a multidimensional approach to well-being is also a key element of students’ academic success at SU. Studies have shown that well-being, mental health, student support, and academic learning are interconnected and co-influential.^v Furthermore, addressing such factors can help improve student success at multiple levels.^{vi} An increasing number of students are coming to Southwestern facing additional stresses and in need of additional support. Students have a desire for independence but are uncertain about how to appropriately implement skills. This seems to increase stress, adjustment, and homesickness concerns, as well as anxiety and depression. When this is the case, students are less likely to get involved on campus, develop strong peer connections, or reach out to professors or other offices for support which can impact their connection to the school and their overall academic performance.

Ultimately, this QEP works to address the interconnected nature of well-being and social justice work for the various constituencies of our campus and at different levels. It focuses on students, faculty, and staff, bridges academic and co-curricular, and would connect academic departments with student life. Some of this work is already being done on campus -- see below under Question 5, Current Resources -- but it is often not connected or adequately resources, invested in, and supported. Enhancing and extending the work of embodied social change on our campus would be a major way to care for our students, faculty, and staff, in both formal and informal ways, and to forefront the social and political importance of healing work in our culture.

Southwestern University

How does the QEP connect to Southwestern’s mission, purpose, or values? The overall goals of this QEP proposal aligns with Southwestern’s mission of seeking “*to involve the student in finding a personal and social direction for life, developing more sensitive methods of communication, cultivating those qualities and skills which make for personal and professional*

effectiveness, and learning to think clearly and make relevant judgments and discriminations". Furthermore, implementation of this initiative connects with Southwestern's core value of "promoting lifelong learning and a passion for intellectual and personal growth, Encouraging activism in the pursuit of justice and the common good, Being true to oneself and others, and respecting the worth and dignity of persons."

How does the QEP contribute to Southwestern's strategic plan? The goals of this QEP proposal directly contribute to three out of the four goals that comprise Southwestern University's strategic plan. Specifically, increasing student retention, fostering differentiated educational and co-curricular experiences by offering students a variety of co-curricular programs that support leadership, creativity, and physical, mental, and spiritual well-being; and cultivating the culture and practices among faculty and staff necessary to sustain institutional excellence and a community focused on student success.

The proposed initiatives and enhancement of current practices are designed to increase awareness and intentionality in bridging well-being and social justice. In addition to the obvious factors such as nutrition, physical activity, alcohol and drug use, there are a variety of factors that compromise the well-being of college students. For example, interpersonal concerns, academic pressures, adjustment/homesickness, balancing academics, social life and work. The negative effects of these stressors are compounded by students' inability to use proper coping strategies.^{vii} One of the goals of this QEP is to provide students with strategies to manage through present circumstances and empower them to creatively work to cultivate change. Well-being influences learning, increases success, skills, behaviour, knowledge, values, sense of belonging and engagement with the community. Positive changes in these areas may increase student retention and ability to graduate within 5 years.

Initiatives: This QEP would utilize some programs already in existence (Mosaic programs, involvement with CDSJ, Health Education programs, Workshops from the Counseling Center) with the additional development of specific programs/experiences. These programs could include volunteer experiences, field trips, development of town hall meetings to discuss social action and justice. This could be implemented for first year students which they could elect to first participate as part of their first year seminar and require subsequent semester participation. By developing an initial connection and requiring continued semesters of being together, variables of retention, connection to peers, connection to the university, adjustment, homesickness, applicability of material, etc. could be assessed every semester.

1. Universalize Summer Bridge Experience for all first year students. Southwestern currently hosts several programs that already help prepare "high risk" students for a smoother adjustment to campus life. For example, in the DRAFT and EQUIP programs, incoming first year students who are first-generation college students, racial and ethnic minority students, and/or low income students come to campus to live in the dorms and take classes for a week over the summer. They are also familiarized with campus support resources. The DRAFT program already builds in therapeutic writing and contemplative practices, connecting both with the work of social justice. Our QEP would universalize cohort building experiences and education in well-being for all incoming first-years before they arrive in the Fall. The program, whatever that might look like, should have a strong base for difficult discussions. In order for this to effectively happen, elements of safety should be cultivated within the group early. This could happen in a first year seminar class or with a residence hall group. Within this group, early 21st century skills would be discussed like effective study skills, appropriate self-care, professionalism as a student, etc. These could expand to conversations and high impact experiences addressing privilege, racial injustice, white fragility, and getting involved in social justice work.

2. Workshops to help faculty develop new courses or modules for their current courses that integrate elements of well-being, embodied social change, or healing justice or that integrate these elements more deeply into existing courses. Faculty would be compensated for their time and final product.

3. Campus wide workshops on self-care, coping skills, meditation, mindfulness, trauma-informed pedagogy, anti-racist pedagogy, embodied social change, etc. Many of our faculty and staff members already possess this training: fore-fronting the necessity of this training, prioritizing it, compensating faculty for doing this professional development training would all be key parts of this QEP.

4. Campus-wide lectures for community engagement both in learning and conversing about embodied work, contemplative practices, healing justice. We would invite guest speakers to come to campus to speak on these themes.

5. Professional development, training, and education for faculty related to trauma-informed pedagogies.

Assessment:

1. *Empower students to become agents of change*: Students would be assessed at two different points in time, using the Social Justice Scale.^{viii}

2. *Enable students to contextualize wellness within the framework of social justice*: For students, the faculty member who teaches a module would assign a reflection or assignment. The faculty development course module can be assessed on the number of participating faculty in the workshops and how many modules are submitted and implemented. Additional data can be collected via the use of PRESENCE platform.

3. *Educate and engage students with the interconnected resources on campus that exist to support well-being, embodied social change, and healing justice*: The software PRESENCE will allow data collection and analysis of student participation in the various activities (workshops, guest lectures, mindfulness practice, etc.)

QEP Project Resources/Participants:

Participants: students, faculty and staff

Current resources: As described above, Southwestern currently has in place programs and spaces that fosters the interconnection of well-being and social justice for the entire campus community. These include: Counseling Center (individual and group therapy); they also offer several psychoeducation workshops (mindfulness, self-care toolkit, emotion regulation and relationships and communication); the Center of Academic Success, Mosaic, Dean of the Faculty Office, Institutional Research Office, the Office of Diversity Education, Coalition for Diversity and Social Justice, Health Education, student organizations, FYS, the DRAFT and EQUIP programs, some PAI seminars, some social justice-designated classes, some Health studies minor classes, some faculty development workshops (for example, on Inclusion).

Personnel needed: two new counselors, with an emphasis to recruit people of color. An additional staff person for Mosaic and a liaison staff position involved in the development, implementation and management of this initiative.

Professional development, training, and education for faculty related to trauma-informed pedagogies. Faculty development of course modules.

More meditation classes offered through Counseling Center and also yoga class offerings through Southwestern Intramural and Recreational Activities (SIRA) (subsidized for students to increase access) and more FRA classes related to embodied practice.

Other needed resources: PRESENCE software: engagement and learning platform that allows administration to track engagement, measure student learning, easy assessment of success and retention. Scholarships for need based students participation in the Summer Bridge Program.

QEP Project Timeline:

First Year (2023-2024): The first year will be dedicated to advertise, search and hire 2 counselors and 2 staff positions (Mosaic and QEP Liaison). Other stakeholders will be involved in brainstorming, planning the logistics and developing a schedule for the workshop/faculty development programs, guest speakers, as well as, summer bridge experience for our incoming students.

Second Year (2024-2025): Hold the first series of workshops (Institutional Trauma Informed Pedagogy - TIP- and course/module development), bring two outside speakers and implementation of 4 new workshops led by Mosaic, Counseling Center or other pertinent office. Hold the first summer bridge experience for our incoming students. Begin assessment.

Third to Fifth year (2025-2028): Training of new faculty to include TIP, implementation of course modules developed the previous year. Hold every year faculty development workshops for new course modules. Implementation of an additional 4 new workshops/year led by Mosaic, Counseling Center or other pertinent office. Bring to campus 2 guest speakers/year. Offer the summer bridge experience to our incoming students. Continue assessment of the QEP.

Fifth year (2027-2028): Submit Impact report to SACSCOC in September. At the end of the five years there would be a total of 16 new workshops developed by Mosaic, Counseling Offices or other offices, 25 new course modules integrating elements of well-being, embodied social change, or healing justice; 8 total guest speakers, all tenure and tenure track faculty would have participated in TIP workshops and ongoing faculty development programs. Southwestern will have implemented a summer bridge experience and a program to train both faculty and staff new hires.