

UNH Joins Health Promoting Campuses Network

More than 110 U.S. schools have adopted focus on campus-wide wellness

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The University of New Hampshire has joined a rapidly growing community of more than 110 colleges and universities throughout the country by becoming a member of the U.S. Health Promoting Campuses Network (USHPCN), an initiative designed to “infuse health and well-being into all of our everyday operations” at UNH, according to Kathleen Grace-Bishop, director of education and promotion at [UNH Health & Wellness](#).

Grace-Bishop is UNH’s liaison to the [USHPCN](#), a support network

available to member schools to help with the definition and development of strategies and creation of metrics to enhance what it means to be a health-promoting campus.

“The goal is that well-being really becomes embedded in our culture here, so we can continue to evolve as an institution that supports the health and well-being of every member of our community,” Grace-Bishop says.

That culture will be characterized by “prioritizing compassion, health and well-being, social justice, equity and inclusion as part of our values and mission for our entire community,” UNH President Jim Dean said in a recent message to faculty, staff and students.

UNH’s interest in participating in the USHPCN came out of work done by the university’s Health and Well-Being Task Force, which encouraged joining the network. Other schools have seemingly had similar conversations, as participation continues to rise – Grace-Bishop noted that membership was right around 90 when she began drafting information to share in early fall and has already risen to more than 110 in a matter of months.

The initiative will be active on all of UNH’s campuses, not just Durham, with a focus on everyone in the entire university community – faculty, staff and students.

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“We are looking at wellness and well-being from the broadest perspective possible. We want to look at the needs of all of our populations,” Grace-Bishop says. “The hope is really to identify a broad base of needs throughout our campuses, with the idea of having the institution over time begin to look at everything we do through the lens of health and

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The origins of the USHPCN can be traced back to 2015 and the creation of the [Okanagan Charter](#), a guiding and aspirational document that was

developed following that year's International Conference on Health Promoting Universities and Colleges.

Following the creation of networks in other countries, momentum built quickly throughout 2020 for a similar structure in the U.S., and the University of Alabama at Birmingham became the first U.S. institution to formally adopt the USHPCN charter in December of that year. The first USHPCN Summit was held in February 2021, and a month later more than 40 campuses were actively involved.

With participation now up over 110 schools and climbing, the network is a tremendous resource, Grace-Bishop says. UNH will be able to take part in monthly Zoom meetings where campuses share successes and developments, and members of national organizations can answer questions and disseminate information.

Wellness has long been an objective UNH has embraced, but the pandemic brought into focus just how important the well-being of every member of the university community is in maintaining a nurturing environment. Joining the USHPCN will allow that work to continue blossoming.

"The pandemic really drew attention to how important it is to have a campus commitment to the health and well-being of the entire community, knowing that if we want our students to be successful here and in the future, we need to be paying attention to this issue, but not just for them – if our employees are not also well and healthy, we can't create a whole engaged, productive and thriving community," Grace-Bishop says.

Work in the areas of health and well-being is always ongoing, Grace-Bishop said, and a big part of the process at UNH will reflect perhaps the most beneficial aspect of participating in the USHPCN – taking advantage of input from as many sources as possible.

Grace-Bishop said she encourages anyone that wants to get involved to reach out to her directly, as the goal is to involve any and all participants who are interested in helping the university identify ways to increase health and well-being, be it in systems, policies, practices, resources or other areas.

“We want to engage the voices of everyone on all of our campuses,” Grace-Bishop says. “The whole idea is embedding health and wellness into all aspects of our campus culture, and in the long run the hope is things we are doing on our campuses can then impact what’s happening locally and globally.”

Want to get involved? Grace-Bishop can be reached at kathleen.grace-bishop@unh.edu.

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