The *Wise Interventions Database*: Supporting Faculty and Student Affairs Professionals Use of Effective Strategies
by Sara J. Finney

Where can higher education professionals (i.e., faculty, student affairs educators) find high-quality information regarding effective pedagogy, strategies, programming, and curriculum? How can we determine what scholarship is providing credible evidence of effectiveness versus (mis)information that should be ignored? How should we summarize the existing credible evidence to inform our educational programming decisions?

There exist various collections of evidence for the effectiveness of particular programming, pedagogies, activities, and strategies (e.g., What Works Clearinghouse, Campbell Collaboration, Visible Learning Meta[X], CollegAim, Culture of Respect, textbooks on effective teaching approaches). One resource that I find particularly helpful is the database of Wise Interventions. Why? Its coverage of outcomes relevant to higher education coupled with its high-quality research and evidence-informed programming logic allows me to select and justify my educational strategies. This useful website summarizes short yet powerful interventions that impact academic achievement, behavior, self-control, health, and belonging, among other outcomes (Walton & Wilson, 2018).

These Wise Interventions showcase that interventions do not need to be long, complex, or difficult to implement to have an impact on students (Walton, 2014). They can be short activities that are not advertised or even perceived as educational programming by the students. They are "wise" because they target the underlying psychological process influencing the outcome of interest. If you want to solve a problem or impact an outcome (e.g., low student achievement, lack of civic engagement, lack of student diversity in an academic degree program, binge drinking), you need to figure out the causes of the problem or outcome. It turns out that *how* students make sense of things (e.g., negative interpretations of tests, others, self, social situations) matters. Our intentional strategies in and out of the classroom can influence students' subjective interpretations and ultimately the outcome of interest (e.g., achievement, enrollment, retention, healthy behavior).

For example, a one-hour intervention, where students learned and then explained to others that social adversities are normal during college, buffered the impact of negative experiences on sense of belonging, which resulted in improved grades and health outcomes for minoritized students (Walton & Cohen, 2011). More specifically, underrepresented students or students who face negative stereotypes may wonder if people like them belong at college. This "belonging uncertainty" influences their academic performance, which contributes to inequity in achievement. That is, these negative

interpretations of belonging can result in students acting in ways that become self-fulfilling, which then reinforces the belief that they do not belong. However, by targeting and altering their perception of belonging uncertainty, we can influence students' subsequent academic achievement. What is an effective strategy to alter belonging uncertainty for minoritized students? These students must understand that adversities (e.g., loneliness, criticism) *are* typical for *all* new students and that these adversities diminish with time. Adversities are not evidence that "people like me" do not belong at the university. This change in perception resulted in minoritized students no longer feeling belonging uncertainty when they faced adversities. They also studied and engaged with faculty more. Ultimately, the minoritized students who engaged in the intervention experienced three years of improved grades.

What were the specific components of this powerful intervention? This [brief 1-hour activity](#) framed social adversity as common and transient. To internalize the information, educators asked students to create written and oral messages to share with prospective students (i.e., active processing of information versus passively receiving information). Beyond facilitating internalization, this strategy averted the potential stigma of receiving an intervention because students viewed themselves as benefactors helping others and not as beneficiaries. By encouraging students to adopt this framing of adversity as their own and share it with other students, [this powerful "saying-is-believing" instructional strategy](#) made the message "stick" and affect belonging and achievement.

The Wise Interventions database includes numerous other strategies relevant to all of us facilitating learning experiences at JMU. There is programming applicable to Offices of Student Success that focus on academic achievement outcomes, Offices of Health and Wellness that focus on wellbeing and physical health outcomes, Offices of Civic Engagement that focus on voting and other civic behavior outcomes (ask [Abe Goldberg](#) about his application of one of these strategies to increase voting among JMU students), Offices of Orientation and Residence Life that focus on sense of belonging outcomes, and STEM degree programs with the intended outcomes of retaining and supporting underserved populations, among other brief strategies that faculty can implement in their own classrooms to impact learning outcomes (Walton & Wilson, 2018).

For those of you searching for effective student learning and development strategies using common search engines (e.g., ERIC, PsycNET), I encourage you to take a look at the Wise Interventions database. These Wise Interventions 1) acknowledge that how students make sense of themselves and the learning context influences their behavior, 2) provide a rationale for what will be effective with which students and when, 3) alter maladaptive subjective interpretations with brief, easy-to-implement strategies, and 4) can have a lasting impact across semesters and beyond college.

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