

# Positive Interactions and Supportive Learning Environments:

Keys to Enhanced Student Engagement

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# Project's origin

The alarm was raised about students' mental health after the 2022 Students' Health and Well-being Survey reported that many students struggled with mental health issues!



# What do we know

- Students as a group are slightly more prone to mental health issues than non-students.
- The situation hasn't worsened; there are simply more students now.
- 85% of university students with mental health issues had them before starting.

The university is  
not the challenge  
but the  
opportunity!



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What can we do at the university  
to prevent mental health issues?



# What leads to increased well-being?



COMMUNITY



BELONGING



MEANING



MATTERING

## **This led us to the question:**

What opportunities exist within the learning environment to enhance students' well-being?

# Additionally, we know...

- Students who are doing well tend to be more engaged, and conversely, those who are engaged often experience better well-being.
- University staff play a central role in promoting student well-being



# Narrative Approach

- Our research is based on narrative data from the "In My Experience" initiative, where NTNU students shared firsthand accounts of their academic journey.
- We conducted a narrative analysis of the stories that focused on the learning environment.

# What do the students say?

- Importance of caring lecturers
- Creating a positive classroom environment
- Engaging and understandable teaching
- Individual guidance and mentorship

# A student narrative

*“I started my master’s program and entered an environment focused on camaraderie. Attending classes, being part of a class—both lecturers and students cared. We all wanted to create a social and rewarding learning environment. Having study spaces together in groups was fantastic. It became a safe haven where we could always come to study with classmates. It was about fostering a culture and context that made it easier to meet and study together”*

# A student narrative

“...when I encountered highly dedicated teachers during my exchange in Barcelona. This experience led me to reconsider my decision to quit my studies and instead continue”

# A student narrative

“I had a teacher during the first two years of my studies who went the extra mile to create a positive classroom environment and build strong relationships with us students. Even something as simple as her greeting everyone and making us feel welcome in class made me feel seen and included. She was proficient in her subject matter, and I believe most of us had great confidence in her expertise. However, it was her demeanor that truly motivated us to attend her lectures”

# Understanding the narratives

Combining Rogers' humanistic approach with Collins' sociological insights suggests that creating a supportive and cohesive learning environment is crucial. Empathy, acceptance, and positive social interactions are essential for fostering student well-being, motivation, and academic success!

