Social Emotional Learning in Higher Education: A Review of Services Available in Northeast Colleges and Universities

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Clinical Question

How are Social Emotional Learning (SEL) services represented and made accessible at colleges and universities in four Northeastern states?

Background

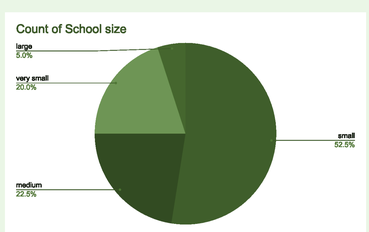
Social-emotional learning (SEL) is an approach to learning where children and adolescents are given opportunities to learn and practice social-emotional skills necessary to succeed in life. Oberle and colleagues (2016) outlined the five universal core competencies of SEL to include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Stocker and colleagues (2019) found that implementing these competencies into the college curriculum improved students' ability to identify stressors as positive challenges instead of threats. The authors also noted improvements in students' ability to find and use available resources to cope with stress. Similarly, Wang and colleagues (2012) found that SEL curriculum for college freshmen improved development of social skills, emotional skills, and overall access to education. In addition, the authors noted that students exposed to a SEL curriculum reported higher grade point averages than students not involved in SEL. Social-emotional learning, however, is not a service that is often marketed at many colleges or universities.

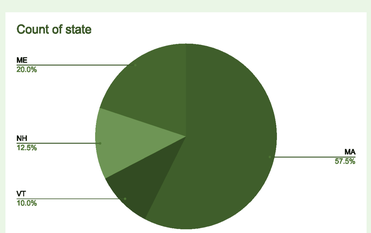
While occupational therapy practice is supported legislatively in postsecondary settings, it is not a common or well understood practice (Keptner and McCarthy, 2020). These authors found that services are offered through direct and indirect methods and are most often provided through the offices of disability and accessibility. The primary population served were students diagnosed with a mental illness and the services focused on four of the five SEL catagories.

Methods

Following a randomized stratified selection of 40 colleges and universities in Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont, a web-based analysis of institutional websites was conducted to gather relevant SEL-related information. Data was collected in three main categories; institutional data, student demographics, and the presence or absence of SEL-related services.

Institutional Demographics





Results

Results indicate few schools have SEL resources available at the college level. Seventeen point five percent of those surveyed indicated that the embedded SEL initiatives across the college while the remaining 82.5% did not. Private institutions are more likely to implement SEL initiatives when compared to public schools. Public institutions however focus more on academic support and equity and inclusion efforts. Medium to large institutions were more likely to have a comprehensive SEL program than smaller institutions. We found that 20% of the schools reported embedding SEL into their curriculums. Four year colleges and universities have more SEL programming, particularly in curriculum embedding, faculty training, and student life integration.

The most common SEL-related programs across all institutions are:

- Equity and Inclusion efforts
- Student Life and Engagement activities
- Degree Programs with SEL components

The least common are:

- Dedicated SEL Initiative
- Mental Health Counseling Services specifically related to SEL

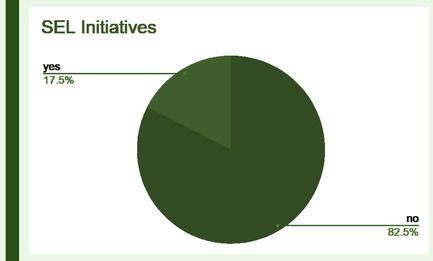
Pearson's Correlation Coefficients

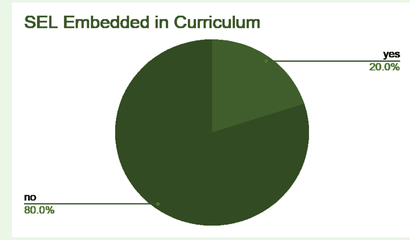
	SEL Initiatives	SEL Embedded in Curriculum	SEL in Faculty Training	Degree Programs with SEL	Workshops offered in SEL	Academic Support using SEL	Mental Health Counseling with SEL	Peer Mentoring based in SEL	DEI Efforts related to SEL	Student Life and Engagement
Enrollment	0.027	-0.153	0.086	0.000	-0.160	-0.022	-0.039	-0.046	-0.042	0.021
Two or Four Year Degree	0.091	0.120	0.059	0.046	0.332	-0.265	-0.074	0.198	0.196	-0.021
Public/ Private	0.182	-0.149	0.241	0.174	0.088	0.012	-0.050	0.004	0.061	0.178

Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the strength and direction of these relationships. Mental health and Counseling services and Degree Programs with SEL as part of the program showed the strongest positive correlation and reached statistical significance ($r=0.368$, $p<0.05$), indicating that institutions with structured degree programs that include SEL are more likely to offer SEL-informed mental health services. Social Emotional Learning in faculty training and the size of enrollment exhibit a weak positive correlation ($r=0.241$), however, this was not found to be statistically significant. This indicates that institutions with larger enrollments may have more faculty engagement with SEL training, however, this relationship is not strong. All other correlations between SEL and institutional properties remained weak ($r<\pm0.30$), suggesting limited associations.

Discussion

Institutions that offer degree programs grounded in SEL (i.e. teaching, counseling, social work) are more likely to integrate SEL principles into services available for all students. The results of the statistical analysis indicates there is a high likelihood that other factors contribute to the presence or absence of SEL services offered at an institution of higher education.





The above graphs demonstrate that there are few SEL programs that exist for current students in Northeast colleges and universities. Of the institutions that were surveyed, 17.5% of them had SEL initiatives, and 82.5% did not have any sort of SEL opportunities offered on their website. Similarly, only 20% of the institutions surveyed indicate that they embed SEL in their curriculum and the remaining 80% did not. In response to our research question "How are (SEL) services represented and made accessible at colleges and universities in four Northeastern states?", these results indicated that they are offered on a very limited basis. Sites must be searched for key words outside of a specific search of Social Emotional Learning or SEL.

Conclusion

Overall, this research analysis reviewed 40 university and college websites from four northeast staes to identify the current trends in SEL services. The findings suggest that SEL programs and services are not explicitly advertised on institution's websites. Furthermore, statistical analyses revealed weak correlations between institutional demographics (enrollment, 2 or 4-year, private or public) and SEL competencies but a positive correlation between SEL degree programs and SEL-related services via mental health counseling. This indicates an increased likelihood for SEL services to be available in colleges and universities that offer programs of study that integrate SEL into the curriculum (i.e. education, social work, counseling). This survey reveals a potential for further exploration and development in the understanding of SEL in collegiate education and the need for explicit marketing of these opportunities. The supporting handout provides occupational therapy practitioners with the necessary information for supporting students' social and emotional needs during the college transition. Future research investigating implicit SEL-related services in postsecondary education and exploring the role of occupational therapy in this area is recommended to gain a more comprehensive understanding of SEL in college and university settings.

References

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Handout