The State of the Good Life Center and Wellness Initiatives at Yale

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BACKGROUND

The Good Life Center is a wellness initiative located in Silliman and unique to Yale College, providing three wellness spaces (a Study, Lounge, and Sandbox Meditation Room), weekly programming, and evidence-based wellness interventions. As campus culture has shifted towards the active promotion of wellness practice and maintenance, other residential colleges, including Murray, Davenport, Pierson, and Berkeley, have created their own wellness centers.

We set out to gather information on student usage patterns and perceived impact on personal wellness of the current Good Life Center in order to investigate the effectiveness of the space. We hope that the data will provide valuable feedback for the Good Life Center’s current practices as well as inform the potential effectiveness of developing wellness spaces. Importantly, the data will help our team, as well as the Yale administration, evaluate the necessity of creating wellness spaces in other colleges that don’t yet have them or push for a central space in the new Schwarzmann Center.


RESEARCH FINDINGS

Through analysis of YCC Fall Survey data, we identified the following key themes:

Usage

Overall, usage is split, with 48.58% of respondents having visited the Good Life Center. Of the students that have not visited, there was still substantial demonstrated intention (62.83% responded having not gone but intended to); the remaining non-visitors (37.17%) indicated having no intention to (Figure 1). We also found that colleges that are located further away demonstrated less engagement with the GLC (e.g., Pauli Murray, Benjamin Franklin, JE), whereas closer colleges (e.g., Berkeley, TD) demonstrated higher proportions of students that have visited, and that visit more often (Figure 2). Highest engagement by far was reported in Silliman, with almost all respondents having visited at least a few times, and roughly half of respondents using the space more often than once a month (Figure 3). Overall, the data indicate that proximity and convenience are crucial factors in determining usage and engagement.

Across years, usage patterns are consistent with most respondents that have visited responding that they have been a few times, substantially smaller proportions responding that they visit between once a week and once a month, and a slightly smaller proportion responding that they visit more often than once a week (Figure 4). As for students who have not been to the GLC, all years had more non-visitors with an intention to visit than without intention, with the exception of the senior class (62.82% of non-visitors expressed having no intention to visit) (Figure 4). Conversely, non-visitor first-years demonstrated extremely high intention to visit compared to no intention (22.27% expressed having no intention to visit while roughly three quarters, 77.73%, indicated intention (Figure 5).

Of respondents that have been to the GLC, 88.79% simply hang out in the space compared to utilizing other services (e.g., workshops, tea time with Tracy). This maps on to demonstrated satisfaction with the atmosphere, with the majority of respondents (60.56%) indicating that the aesthetics and atmosphere of Good Life Center space make them feel calmer and less anxious (6.22% of respondents disagreed with the statement; 16.08% were neutral; see Figure 6).

1 See Appendix for all figures.
9.51% of respondents reported attendance of events, classes, and workshops. This is a low proportion, however, this is due to the limited availability of programming rather than a lack of interest. Programming is highly sought after with most workshops filling up within the day signups are released; the latest Monthly Massage Monday saw a line forming as early as an hour before sign ups were to be posted, and when they were, the 72 individual slots filled up within minutes.

**Schwarzman Center**

We asked respondents to indicate how their engagement would change if the Good Life Center were moved to the Schwarzman Center instead of Silliman. A third of students indicated that they would use it more often (34.12%) and another third indicated no change in engagement (33.46%); a smaller proportion of students reported that they would use it less often (12.75%). About a fifth of respondents were indifferent (19.67%), indicating that they do not currently use the GLC and do not plan to in the future (Figure 7).

The important insight is in the distribution of these answers across colleges; that is, location predicted change in usage patterns. The colleges for which the Schwarzman Center would be significantly closer than Silliman (e.g., Branford, Berkeley, Trumbull) consistently responded that they would use it more often compared to no change in engagement, while the college for which it would move farther (i.e., Silliman and TD) reported substantial decreases in engagement if the GLC were to be moved. In colleges for which both spaces are roughly the same distance, more students reported no change in engagement compared to more or less frequent usage (e.g., Murray, JE). These patterns again illustrate that proximity and convenience are deciding factors in student engagement with wellness spaces.
RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the issues we have identified, we propose the following recommendations:

1. **Target the class of 2023; host more events specific to first-years.**
   a. The data from the Fall Survey shows that out of the four classes of students, the class of 2023 has the highest percentage of students who have not visited the Good Life Center but intend to. Therefore, the Good Life Center should advertise and host more events, such as “Get to Know the Good Life Center” and “How to Deal with First-Year Stress,” that specifically target first-years; not only open houses at the beginning of the year but also events held periodically throughout the school year so that first-years can take the first step of engaging with the GLC by coming to the physical space itself.

2. **The Good Life Center should engage in more dialogue with the Yale student body.**
   a. Various comments provided by students in the Fall Survey suggest that a large portion of the student body has reservations about how the Good Life Center goes about addressing student mental health and wellness. The Good Life Center should host (more) community forums and focus groups in order to gain a better understanding of how the center can engage more students on campus and aid students in more helpful and constructive ways. More frequent dialogue and platforms that address suggestions, criticism, and feedback students have will strengthen the relationship between students and the Good Life Center.
   b. Additional forms of feedback: The Good Life Center should also consider including a survey in one or two of its “Good Life Center Newsletters” (with a heading in the subject line that indicates the email contains a short survey) every year that gauges student (dis)interest and (dis)engagement with the center. In addition, we suggest that the center place a “Feedback Box,” or a similar mechanism of receiving student feedback, at the GLC itself. This way, students will be able to reflect upon their experience at the center immediately after (or while) they are in the space and provide a more concrete assessment of their engagement with the center.
FINAL THOUGHTS

Mental health is a complex topic, and we should not view the Good Life Center in its current state as the panacea for all of the mental health and wellness issues that students at Yale deal with. Therefore, the Good Life Center should continue interacting and engaging with the student body to see how it can best aid students both through various initiatives it is spearheading, as well as through the physical space itself. In addition, once we know whether or not there will be a centralized wellness center in the soon-to-be Schwarzman Center, we will be able to have a better understanding of to what extent we should engage the residential colleges in developing their own wellness centers and initiatives. Should any questions about this report arise, or should any students or administrators be interested in hearing more, please contact us at janie.wu@yale.edu and angelreana.choi@yale.edu.
Figure 1. How often students have been to the Good Life Center.

Figure 2. On average, students in colleges farther away from the Good Life Center (e.g. Benjamin Franklin) visited the center less often than students in colleges closer to the GLC (e.g. Berkeley). The red, purple, and blue bars represent the number of students who have visited the Good Life Center once a week or more, between once a week and once a month, and a few times, respectively.
Figure 3. How often students visited the Good Life Center. Students in Silliman college had the highest engagement with the center.

Figure 4. GLC engagement frequency across years. Pink bars correspond to "once a week or more"; purple indicates "between once a week and once a month"; blue indicates "I've only been a few times." Green bars indicates non-visitors who have no intention to visit ("I have not been to the Good Life Center and do not intend to"); yellow bars indicates non-visitors who intend to visit ("I have not been to the Good Life Center but intend to").
Figure 5. Class of 2023 engagement with the GLC. The green bar indicates non-visitors who have no intention to visit; the yellow bar indicates non-visitors who intend to visit.

Figure 6. Effectiveness of GLC space and services; blue bars indicate quantity of responses to “the aesthetics and atmosphere of the GLC make me feel more calm and less anxious.”
Figure 7. How usage patterns would change if the GLC were moved to Schwarzman.