



STAFF & FACULTY YOGA

YOGA/FITNESS CLASSES

DEPARTMENT

First Year Programs, Arts

CAMPUS

Point Grey

FUNDING YEAR

2016 & 2017

ABOUT HWIP

The Healthy Workplace Initiatives Program (HWIP) is an annual fund available to UBC departments and units to support grassroots activities that promote wellbeing in the workplace. The program provides start-up funds and support for health-related, sustainable initiatives.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Recognizing a gap in wellness resources specifically for staff, the First Year Arts department launched weekly yoga classes for faculty and staff at the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre in 2016. They found an excellent instructor through [UBC Recreation](#) who lead classes that included both physical movement and meditation and were tailored to the varying experiences and abilities in the group. A portion of the HWIP grant was used to purchase yoga mats and blocks.

Colleagues in the building and in other Arts units were invited to attend these classes, allowing First Year Arts staff and faculty to engage with people outside of their own small units with whom they normally would not interact with on a regular basis. While the classes were free for First Year Arts staff and faculty, a small fee was charged for others who attended. These nominal fees, along with some departmental funding, allowed the yoga classes to continue beyond the HWIP funding period.

“Support from our Chair [was the most effective resource in working to ensure the success of the initiative]. She attended the classes and recognized the importance of healthy workplace exercise.”

KEY TO SUCCESS

Key to the success of this initiative was leadership support.

The Department Chair supported the initiative by allowing some “soft funds” to be utilized for subsidizing the cost of ongoing classes. They also attended yoga classes along with other staff and faculty, modeling the importance of taking breaks and integrating wellbeing practices during the workday.

By regularly attending, they were also able to see the positive impacts the classes had on staff and faculty and justify continued financial support for the initiative.

SUSTAINABILITY

One challenge to implementing this initiative was finding dates and times for weekly classes that worked for everyone who wanted to participate.

While weekly classes eventually came to an end in November 2019 when scheduling became too difficult, the First Year Arts department still contracts with their yoga instructor for occasional workshops and special events.

VALUABLE OUTCOMES

Class participants, many of whom attended weekly classes for several years, built up a yoga practice and reported experiencing reduced stress and increased flexibility.

They also improved their mental and social health by taking time away from their desks during the work day and building relationships and sense of community with other attendees.

UBC WELLBEING
STRATEGIC
FRAMEWORK
PRIORITY AREAS

Physical Activity

Social Connection

Mental Health &
Resilience

wellbeing.ubc.ca/framework

ADVICE FOR FUTURE HWIP GRANTEES

Make it accessible for participants and listen to their interests and needs

Try to find an instructor who knows how to work with varying abilities and experience. Choose a time and location that is convenient for your group and create a safe environment where they feel comfortable. The yoga classes could have accommodated more people in a larger room, which would also have allowed more fees to be collected, but the participants expressed appreciating the small group, the convenient location, and peaceful room. So, the classes were kept small and intimate.

“It wasn’t a lack of interest but rather an issue with scheduling [that brought the classes to an end]... Actually, I was in conversation with [our yoga instructor] to do a couple of one-off workshops in the summer. [Because] the desire and demand were there, it’s just a the weekly scheduling was more difficult. We’ll see if we ever get back to that.”
