

## BOOK REVIEW

**Devis-Rozental, C.** (2023). *The student wellbeing toolkit: Preparing for life at college, university and beyond*. Routledge.

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The academic trajectory toward university marks a significant milestone in a student's life. It is widely recognized as a transitional period during which students encounter a spectrum of new challenges. These include making autonomous decisions about their campus life and academic pursuits, adapting to the new learning environment and its demands, and interacting with students from different backgrounds (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2020). The increasing prevalence of such adjustment difficulties among students and their consequential effects on overall well-being is becoming a significant concern within higher education institutions (Cao, 2022; Medlicott et al., 2021). One potential strategy for effectively addressing these challenges is to equip students with the necessary ideas and skills for their academic journey. Students who are well-prepared for university studies are more likely to experience better adjustment and well-being compared to those who are ill-prepared (Campbell et al., 2022).

The book “*The Student Wellbeing Toolkit: Preparing for Life at College, University, and Beyond*”, authored by Devis-Rozental, squarely addresses this issue of equipping students with the essential ideas and skills for exploring campus life. The book could play a role as a guide for students by offering a plethora of tools and ideas to enhance their well-being and adaptability throughout their higher academic study. It delves into the science of well-being and its profound influence on every aspect of a student's pursuit of higher education. Comprising nine chapters, it systematically addresses significant issues of the crucial journey. The purpose of this review is to provide an overview of the ideas of the book, with a particular emphasis on the most pertinent chapters.

In the introductory chapter of the book, the author expounds its organizational structure. She divided the book into nine chapters with the primary focus being centred on an in-depth exploration of the six dimensions of well-being: Physical Well-being, Socioemotional Well-being, Intellectual Well-being, Environmental Well-being, Occupational Well-being, and Financial Well-being. Beyond the book's framework, the author delves into her life's trajectory, which serves as a driving force for writing the book. Originally from Colombia, Devis-Rozental, now a disabled academic, faced a transformative event during her university studies in the UK – a

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severe allergic reaction to a medication that adversely affected her nervous system, ultimately resulting in lasting disability. Motivated by her experience, Devis-Rozental embarked on writing this book with a fervent dedication to supporting and guiding students toward self-fulfilment and championing the humanization of the education system as a whole.

The second chapter of the book reviews the concept of student wellbeing and gives a brief description of the six dimensions of wellbeing, the factors affecting it, and theoretical perspectives about wellbeing. The book has also outlined an extensive array of external (e.g. educational opportunities, politics, socioeconomic status, social connection, access to health care, financial issues, family, etc.) and internal factors (e.g., confidence, self-esteem, psychological needs, stress, neurochemistry, beliefs, sense of purpose etc.), all of which contribute to student well-being. While the author acknowledges the significance of both nature and nurture in determining well-being, there is a specific emphasis on the pivotal role played by the brain in fostering student health. While a broad spectrum of psychological theories on well-being exists, the author highlights Maslow's motivational theory and Steven Covey's concept of the circle of concern and influence as pivotal frameworks for promoting it. Maslow's theory of motivation centres around the belief that every individual possesses the capability and inclination to progress up the hierarchy, ultimately leading to self-actualization. Hence, when students are aware of their needs and equipped with strategies to actualize them, they are more likely to thrive, flourish, and achieve enduring health. Likewise, Covey's concept underscores that many people find themselves trapped by factors beyond their control. However, fixating on uncontrollable circumstances may consume our limited energy and potentially jeopardize our overall well-being. Therefore, university students should concentrate on matters within their control that may influence their well-being.

In the third chapter, the author's focus shifts toward the dimension of physical well-being and numerous factors that play significant roles in fostering and sustaining university students' physical health. Physical well-being refers to an individual's capacity to make healthy life choices and conduct such behaviour as resulting in a good quality of life (Devis-Rozental, 2023a) drawing from her experience, the author also imparts lucid guiding ideas for students with certain disabilities on how to accept their support requirements from the university. Additionally, the chapter underlines the significance of maintaining good health, emphasizing that students can only accomplish their academic goals when they are in optimal physical condition. Furthermore, the author illustrated several critical factors empirically established as primary aspects of students' physical well-being. These encompass exercise, diet, personal hygiene, sleep, stress, substance abuse, and sexual behaviours. The author also discusses the significance of dietary practices in maintaining the physical well-being of students. University students must adopt a balanced and mindful approach to their nutrition, as diet and lifestyle directly influence the optimal functioning of our body and mind. Conversely, poor dietary habits can have detrimental effects, potentially leading to a range of health issues such as anxiety, irritability, low mood, and addictive behaviours.

The following chapter presents comprehensive accounts of social and emotional well-being and an exploration of socio-emotional intelligence and its fundamental components. Given diverse theoretical perspectives on wellbeing, there are various approaches to conceptualizing socio-emotional wellbeing. Within the framework of subjective well-being, it is defined as a psychological state characterized by feelings of emotional stability and satisfaction (Devis-Rozental, 2023a). Additionally, it pertains to our perception of the world in the context of



our social interactions. Socio-emotional well-being is considered a vital reservoir for students in their preparation for college, university, and beyond. Those who possess a sufficient understanding of their emotions are effective learners and better equipped to allocate their time wisely to academic endeavours. The book also introduces the striking concept of socio-emotional intelligence. This term was first introduced by Devis-Rozental in 2013 drawing upon the domains of emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and practical intelligence (Devis-Rozental, 2023b). Traditionally, emotional and social intelligence have been viewed as distinct constructs. However, contemporary discourses posit that they are intricately intertwined concepts and challenging to disentangle (Devis-Rozental & Eccles, 2017). After establishing a comprehensive definition, the author delineates five crucial components of socio-emotional intelligence (i.e., self-awareness, motivation, managing emotions self-compassion, and social awareness) that hold significance during the transition to university.

The fifth chapter of the book provides an overview of intellectual well-being. It navigates various mental processes integral to intellectual well-being such as memory, learning, problem-solving, and reflection. The first part of the chapter deliberates on intelligence from different perspectives. The author contends that the skill of learning how to learn is one of the critical factors for academic success for university students. Knowing how to effectively invest one's intellectual assets stands a great significance in the process of learning. This begins with clear knowledge and understanding of what intelligence entails. Unlike the old-fashioned understanding of intelligence as a fixed and predetermined ability, emerging theorists are evident that intelligence is not stable; rather, it is open to change and development through experience. Further, intelligence includes a multitude of aspects beyond cognitive elements (Devis-Rozental, 2023a). Considering different perspectives, the author also describes typical characteristics of intelligence that enhance students' comprehensive knowledge and understanding of intelligence. Besides, the book provides an overview of the different learning paradigms such as behaviourism, constructivism, social-learning theory, experiential learning, and self-directed learning. I contend that these perspectives are essential in augmenting students' sense of understanding of diverse learning mechanisms. Moreover, the book covers vital aspects of learning and intellectual well-being, including metacognition, mode of thinking, growth mindset, and memory. In contrast, impediments to learning such as lack of social support, lack of self-belief, lack of time, and lack of assertiveness are addressed. The author also proposes practical strategies to assist students in overcoming these barriers. For example, self-kindness and compassion are highlighted as a means to the cultivation and development of assertiveness.

Once the foundational background information related to intelligence and learning is established in the first part, the subsequent portion of the chapter provides a concise overview of essential academic skills and ideas, furnishing valuable guidance for university students embarking on their academic journey. Among the pivotal academic skills recommended for university students, effective time management stands out as a cornerstone of both academic success and personal well-being. Another important academic skill is organizational skills. Although they are usually applied at the organizational level, the author conjectures that they can also be effectively used at individual levels to enhance learning and intellectual well-being. This skill is structured around the principles of SWOT analysis. The author argues that students can employ this tool to critically reflect on their learning activities. In the latter part of the chapter, the author offers a comprehensive overview of various academic responsibilities undertaken by university students



in their pursuit of higher education studies, such as observations, role play, reflections, simulations, portfolio activities, field reports, research projects, essay writing, etc.

In its sixth chapter, the book discusses environmental well-being, specifically focusing on its relevance for the academic journey of university students. As cited in [Devis-Rozental \(2023a\)](#), Stride (2022) defines environmental well-being as a sense of safety, comfort, and connection with one's environment. The author refines this definition by incorporating a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment derived from one's positive contribution to the environment, underscoring these as vital features of environmental wellbeing. To gain a deeper insight into the environmental well-being of university students, the book adopts Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model. The author primarily highlights the profound influence of the environment on students' lives and well-being. Specifically, the book explores how the interaction between students and their physical surroundings affects their opportunities for growth and development. It also delves into how university students can positively influence their environment and, reciprocally, how students can benefit from their positive contribution. This theory is a valuable tool to empower university students to comprehend the numerous factors that influence their wellbeing and developmental potential.

The author also imparts insightful information regarding various types of student accommodations, emphasizing the necessity for students to develop a personalized plan for these. Additionally, the book highlights the significance of connecting with nature and minimizing screen time. Furthermore, it explores important topics concerning equity, diversity, inclusion, and a sense of belonging. Prior familiarity and comprehension of concepts significantly aid students in their transition to tertiary education and adulthood.

The seventh chapter of the book addresses issues related to occupational well-being. Devis-Rozental defines this as a positive attitude people have toward their jobs, coupled with the sense of personal satisfaction derived from engaging in occupational engagement ([Devis-Rozental, 2023a](#)). An equally vital aspect of occupational well-being is the provision of work opportunities for individuals to develop their strengths within the occupational realm. The author further elucidates the overarching significance of personal values and creativity, knowing one's character strength, having a defined sense of purpose, finding one's element, and being in the zone of one's performance along with practical activities and guiding strategies to cultivate them. These considerations bear immense relevance to the academic journey of university students. For instance, personal values and a sense of purpose serve as guiding lights, directing students towards tasks that are meaningful for them and tasks ultimately leading to personal growth and development. This, in turn, can result in personal development and better occupational well-being. In essence, the chapter on occupational well-being provides university students with indispensable insights into the dynamics, opportunities, and demands of the ever-changing job market, equipping them to proactively prepare for it. Consequently, university students can maintain balance and healthy relationships between themselves and their work environment as a whole, ultimately attaining a profound sense of purpose in their lives.

Financial well-being, the last and sixth dimension of student well-being, is expounded in the eighth chapter of the book. Financial well-being refers to the "feeling of having control of your money and feeling secure in the knowledge that you can buy the essential things you need, pay your bills, and deal with unexpected situations by being able to afford them" ([Devis-Rozental, 2023a](#), p. 232). A wide range of factors contribute to the financial well-being of university students, including income, friends, social environment, and family. Devis-Rozental also



sheds light on the relationship between mental health and financial behaviours. She states that several research findings support the link between financial well-being and mental health (Devis-Rozental, 2023a). For university students, it is advised not to obsessively worry about their financial issues. Instead, they should strive for honesty with themselves and endeavour to live within their means. Furthermore, university students need to enhance their financial knowledge and master the art of making sound financial decisions. The chapter also provides valuable information for university students about the social dimension of spending. Apart from covering essential expenses, students allocate funds for activities with their peers. Thus, students must exercise self-control and make prudent choices regarding their social expenditures. Furthermore, they must critically examine negative habits that impact their finances and actively refrain from such habits. Moreover, this chapter briefly outlines ideas and tools to assist university students in creating effective budgets, seeking out financial support from their universities, opening bank accounts, and gaining awareness about potential scams.

The ninth and final chapter of the book presents concluding remarks concerning the implications of its contents for students preparing for college, university, and beyond. The author reiterates the crucial role of knowledge and skills in promoting the overall well-being of students. However, achieving and sustaining well-being requires daily practice. Furthermore, the chapter embraces significant motivational quotations that have positive impact on student well-being.

In summary, university life, while undoubtedly exciting, brings about a range of new experiences from meeting new people and making new friends to learning new academic materials. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that these experiences come hand-in-hand with negative emotions such as stress, anxiety, fear, homesickness, and worries. Addressing these health issues, the book stands out for its comprehensive exploration of students' well-being, placing special emphasis on six crucial dimensions. Another notable strength of the book is that each chapter is enriched with engaging individual-based activities and practical strategies, providing students with a clear roadmap toward acquiring the skills necessary for their journey to university and future endeavours. However, I believe that the book would greatly benefit from recommending practical university-based intervention programs aimed at enhancing student well-being. Further, since it draws primarily from the author's personal experience, it provides limited empirical evidence to substantiate its proposed ideas and tools. Furthermore, while the book explores various psychological approaches to well-being, there appears to be a gap in considering those theories to establish a unified understanding of student well-being.

Taken together, given the profound significance and broad applicability of the book, the reviewer strongly recommends it to students, teachers, counsellors, educational practitioners, and all those involved in the realm of higher education. For example, teachers and counsellors may use it as a guiding document to raise student awareness about the importance of well-being.

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