

Tech Snacks: “First Six Weeks” Themes in the Classroom

The first six weeks of the academic year present a pivotal opportunity for fostering a sense of community and belonging among students on campus. With that in mind, the MSUN Student Engagement Committee has worked to develop an intentional set of experiences that can help students connect with values that are important to our institution. The “First Six Weeks” program includes many daily events and activities, each of which is aligned with a designated theme for that particular week. Instructors can contribute to this initiative by incorporating these themes into classroom activities.

Disclaimer: all of these suggestions should be prefaced by the phrase “where appropriate”.

Week 3: Wellbeing

The concept of “wellbeing” extends into areas such as mental health, work-life balance, and wellness. Where “wellness” traditionally focuses on physical and emotional health, the idea of “wellbeing” focuses on five common elements that all humans (read: students, faculty, and staff) need in order to thrive in their lives. These five elements are:

Purpose: liking what you do each day and being motivated to achieve your goals; knowing that you are contributing to a greater goal or greater good.

Social: having supportive relationships and love in your life, including strong relationships with classmates, faculty and staff.

Financial: managing your economic life to reduce stress and increase security. This relates to student loans, college tuition, and school supplies, as well as general living expenses.

Community: liking where you live, feeling safe and having pride in your community, including pride in the campus or school and having a sense of belonging.

Physical: having good health and enough energy to get things done daily. For students to have thriving physical wellbeing, they need nutritious meals, exercise, and sufficient sleep.

Example Activities

- *Use metacognitive activities to get students thinking about connections between their study skills and habits of wellbeing (e.g., using a self-assessment about their own habits with sleep, regular eating, device/attention management, time management).*
- *Incorporate journaling exercises or discussions on a wellbeing topic related to your subject.*
- *Incorporate outdoor activities, such as walking, identifying plants/rocks/soils, drawing or painting scenes from nature, etc. Or have students visit Beaver Creek Park or the Milk River levee for a class assignment or field trip (e.g., for science, agriculture, CET, writing, art).*
- *Connect students with the MSUN Community Center for resources they might be able to acquire there if finances are tight.*

Week 4: Community Engagement

Community engagement, as conceptualized for the “First Six Weeks” program, refers to students engaging with both the campus community and the broader Havre community. Many of our students come to Northern with limited knowledge of the Havre areas, so opportunities to engage with what Havre and Northern have to offer will bridge that gap and help students make those connections.

Example Activities

- *Design a project that requires students to engage with, provide a service for, or analyze a local business or organization (e.g., design a logo for a local organization, create a bench for a charity, coordinate an activity for kids at the Boys and Girls Club).*
- *Create an assignment that prompts students to interview a current employee of a local business in their career field.*
- *Encourage students to build a class float for the Festival Days parade (for extra credit).*

Week 5: Diversity Awareness & Appreciation

Diversity awareness means being aware of, respectful of, and embracing the variety of diverse aspects of humanity, whether race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender identity and expression, ability or disability, politics, class, or sexuality. For many students, their first concrete exposure to some aspects of diversity – or their first opportunity to reflect about that diversity – might be in college. This week in particular presents a great opportunity to increase awareness, thoughtfulness, and appreciation among our student body.

Example Activities

- *Encourage your class to attend a presentation by indigenous language educator Dwayne Lasas, who will be presenting at MSUN on 9/21 & 9/22 (sponsored by the Little River Institute, time and location TBA).*
- *Invite an industry representative from an underrepresented background to speak with your students or provide a guest lecture.*
- *Invite a former graduate from an underrepresented background to give a guest lecture to your students regarding the different career opportunities they can pursue.*

Week 6: Homecoming

Homecoming is a tradition of welcoming back alumni or other former members of a community to celebrate an institution, its culture and values, its spirit of “place,” and the sense of belonging that it provided to those community members while they were there. This theme provides an excellent opportunity to explore themes of home, belonging, inclusion (and exclusion), history and tradition, connection to place, and returning home.

Example Activities

- *Have students write about what home means to them and reflect upon the elements of home that they have or don't have here at MSUN, including ideas to find/create some of those elements here.*
- *Have students reflect on ways that they can help others find a sense of belonging here (e.g., inviting a classmate to coffee; inviting a non-local student to Thanksgiving dinner if they're local).*
- *Find ways to connect students with alumni perspectives (and possibly opportunities for mentorship?) by alumni. For instance, invite alumni into the classroom to talk about how their education/experience at Northern shaped their career/life trajectory.*
- *Find ways for the class to contribute to homecoming events in a way that is relevant to the course and can be a showcase for alumni (e.g., showpieces in creative fields).*

Relevant Events Calendars

For each theme noted above, you might also consider encouraging students to attend events on campus coordinated through the Student Engagement Committee. For more info see the Stall Street Journal, MSUN's social media, and emails from Corey Kopp.

Havre Daily News community events calendar

<https://www.havredailynews.com/page/community-events-calendar/2504.html>

Havre Chamber area events calendar

<https://www.havreareaevents.net/>

MSU-Northern activities calendar

<https://www.msun.edu/xcalendar/CalendarNOW.aspx>

MSU-Northern athletics

<https://golightsgo.com/index.aspx>