STUDENT FLOURISHING THROUGH FACULTY FLOURISHING:

SELF-DETERMINATION FOR ALL

by

LIESL M. WUEST

(Under the Direction of KAREN E. WATKINS)

ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of course design on student flourishing in higher education using Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017) as a framework. In addition to research-based practices around student learning, this framework includes research-based strategies that have been shown to improve a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom supporting both learning outcomes and flourishing outcomes. This research studies what is learned about students, faculty, and the institution in the implementation of the new course design model that emphasizes both learning and flourishing. This model is illustrated in Appendix A, the Purposeful Course Design Handbook.

Using an action research approach, the study includes faculty from different departments and central administrative units highlighting the interdisciplinary and systemic approach of the research. Once the Purposeful Course Design model was created, the study investigates how intentional course design supports students' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby improving their experience in the class. The findings

indicate that courses designed with SDT principles significantly improve students' sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness ranging from 13% to 22%.

Equally important, the research highlights the critical role of faculty flourishing in achieving student flourishing, emphasizing the need for institutional support, time, and recognition for faculty efforts in course design and teaching. Fostering a supportive environment that prioritizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness for both students and faculty is essential for holistic educational success.

The findings in this research are important because efforts to increase students' success, well-being, engagement, flourishing etc. often focus on the technical support – the money, the programming, the structure – but not the adaptive work of support for the implementers, collaboration, and enrollment in the change. This clearly illustrates that if a college or university wants to have the downstream results of student flourishing, it needs to do the upstream work of creating an environment that supports the people doing that work.

INDEX WORDS: action research, student flourishing, faculty flourishing, self-determination theory, instructional design, teaching practices, collaborative learning, professional development, educational strategies, student-centered pedagogy

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by

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# DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the people in my life who made this work possible through their support in time, thought, and love.

To my husband, Bill, thank you for supporting me with all three! The time to read, work, and attend classes. Your thoughts and ideas reading multiple drafts of multiple papers. And of course, for your ceaseless love and support throughout this work and always!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

# LIST OF TABLES

Page

# LIST OF FIGURES

Page

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION & THE LITERATURE

In the fall of 2021, Ely University, a mid-sized, private, R1 university in the southeast, launched a university campaign emphasizing three major goals, one of which was student flourishing. The university says student flourishing means "seeing students realize their potential, preparing them for a lifetime of accomplishment beyond graduation, providing an inclusive environment, valuing each student, and enabling them to excel in academics and all aspects of their lives" (The Future Starts Here: Building Ely's Commitment to Serve Humanity, 2022). Interviews with Ely administrators in student development, student support services, student health services, extracurricular student experiences, and faculty administration revealed that the commitment to student flourishing came from a desire to improve student retention rates, which was a little below its peers, and improve student satisfaction and well-being, also reported slightly below its peers (NCHA-III Spring 2022 Ely University Institutional Executive Summary, 2022). Not just at Ely, but throughout higher education in general, it has become increasingly apparent that student success has strong ties to students' sense of well-being and purpose. Even before the 2020 Covid pandemic, students were beginning to report high levels of disengagement (Swaner, 2007; Fink, 2014; Brewer et al., 2018; Fischman & Gardner, 2022), and it continues to be a formidable issue as schools like Georgetown, Bucknell, and the University of Maine, just to name a few, have dedicated programs exploring well-being, purpose, and flourishing in the classroom (Flaherty, 2023; Pelletier et al., 2023; *LearningWell*, 2023). Ely's current focus on

student flourishing is generally developing programs around peer and institutional belonging. This is why it was necessary to also be looking at how to develop a greater sense of belonging in the academic sphere, primarily through rethinking how courses are designed and aligned.

Contemporarily defined, flourishing is the presence of positive feelings and functioning in life. This could be through a strong sense of purpose, satisfaction with self, independence, and humility, among other attributes (Keyes 1998, 2002; Seligman, 2011). The term "flourishing" dates back to Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia,* translated to "happiness". Some suggest that "flourishing" or "fulfillment" are a closer translation. That is, happiness in the sense that we are living our best life possible given individual circumstances. It is not about avoiding what is unpleasant or difficult, rather learning how to cope productively with whatever life throws at us (Aristotle & Lesley Brown, 2009; Seligman, 2011). Corey Keyes's 2002 seminal work around mental health introduces mental health as a continuum of an absence ("languishing") or presence ("flourishing") of mental health. Languishing is associated with mental illnesses like depression and anxiety and interferes with one's ability to participate in school, work, social activities, and more. Flourishing, on the other hand, is the presence of mental health and is associated with positive feelings of well-being. Like physical health, mental health can be strengthened or weakened through actions, inactions, environments, and habits. Table 1 below outlines several definitions of flourishing that are used today.

**Table 1**

*Definitions of Flourishing*

| Year | Author | Field/Theory | Definition |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1985; 2017 | Ryan, Richard M.; Deci, Edward L. | Self-determination Theory | People's basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are "essential for growth, integrity, and well-being" and "must be satisfied for psychological interest, development, and wellness to be sustained" (p.10), in other words, to flourish. |
| 2011 | Seligman, Martin E. P. | Positive Psychology & PERMA Theory of Well-Being | The PERMA Theory of Well-Being is a construct that looks at the building blocks for flourishing. It says flourishing consists of the presence of 5 elements which create the acronym PERMA. They are positive emotions (subjective), engagement (subjective), relationships, meaning, and achievement. It looks different for each person and there are many routes to a flourishing life. |
| 2002 | Keyes, Corey | Sociology | The presence of positive feelings and functioning in life. This could be through a strong sense of purpose, satisfaction with self, independence, and humility, among other attributes.<br><br>Mental health as a continuum of an absence, "languishing", or presence "flourishing". |
| Ancient Greece, publication 2009 | Aristotle; Brown, Lesley | Philosophy | *Eudaimonia* dates to Aristotle. Some translate this to "happiness", but others suggest that "flourishing" or "fulfillment" are a closer translation. That is, happiness in the sense that we are living our best life possible given individual circumstances, not that we feel happy all the time or should avoid feelings of sadness. It is how you holistically cope with the ups and downs of life and are able to prosper with what you are given |

A theory that closely connects to flourishing both in educational settings and beyond is Ryan & Deci's Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Introduced in 1985 with the most current publication in 2017 (Ryan & Deci, 2017) SDT is comprised of biological, social, and cultural factors that support human capacities for psychological growth, wellness, and engagement. It proposes that people's basic needs for autonomy, competence, and connection/relatedness need to be met for psychological growth and well-being, that is, flourishing (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2019). It is a "broad theory of human development and wellness, with strong implications for education" (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p. 1). Regarding education and flourishing, they state:

> By flourishing, we mean becoming motivated, vital, resourceful, and fully functioning adults. Flourishing individuals feel both empowered and confident in their learning and problem solving and feel a sense of belonging to their schools and their larger human community (. ...)
>
> (…) the promise and hope of school is not only that they enable and enhance cognitive learning and growth in specific subject areas…, but also that they facilitate the development of high-quality motivation, engagement, participation, citizenship, and social-emotional well-being. The capabilities for engagement and self-regulation will likely be more serviceable in subsequent life than any particular facts learned in the schools…they should not discourage, demotivate, or kill the confidence of the students they serve or leave them feeling alienated, reactive, excluded from society, or more antisocial. (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 354)

A chapter in the *Oxford Handbook of Self-Determination Theory* (Ryan, 2023) titled *Education as Flourishing: Self-Determination Theory in Schools as They Are and as The Might Be* starts,

"We begin this chapter with the premise: *The purpose of education is to promote human flourishing"* (Ryan et al., 2023, p. 592, emphasis original). It goes on to discuss flourishing as a developmental outcome that supports growth, proactive agency, enhanced functioning, prosocial relationships, and psychological well-being "…when teachers relate to students and provide instruction in ways that allow students to experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness need satisfactions, students' growth and wellness tends to blossom" (p. 592).

Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are all concepts that can be incorporated into designed experiences and together bring a concrete application to the flourishing initiative. That is, student flourishing can be improved in the classroom by promoting students' sense of autonomy, competency, and relatedness. Alternatively, when those elements are frustrated flourishing in the classroom will decrease.

Using an Action Research (AR) Organizational Development (OD) change process, I developed an updated course design model that promotes student flourishing by applying strategies that support the essential psychological elements of *autonomy*, *competence*, and *relatedness* from Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017) to existing course design models that focus on cognitive/skill growth, equity, and accessibility. While SDT is a theory emerging from psychology, a lot of research has been done applying SDT to educational settings, and what is missing in many models around course development is attention to psychological growth in conjunction with cognitive growth. Effective strategies and models in course design should be continually evolving based on emerging scientific and psychological research, as well as the ongoing needs of students. Current practices include techniques that have emerged recently from the fields of cognitive science and behavioral psychology which help create stronger knowledge and skill creation (Dunlosky et al., 2013; McDaniel & Donnelly,

1996; Brown et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2014), along with the need for course alignment, increased transparency, equitable access to materials, and motivation (Ambrose et al., 2010; Early et al., 2016). More recently, it has become increasingly apparent (Swaner, 2007; Fink, 2014; Brewer et al., 2018; Fischman & Gardner, 2022) that student success has strong ties to the presence of mental health, defined here as "flourishing" (Keyes, 2002; Seligman, 2011).

## Situating the Study in the Literature

### Course Design in Higher Education

Course design aimed at student flourishing is not an entirely new concept and there are several existing pedagogical approaches that address the connection of positive mental health and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to strong academic outcomes—Social-emotional Learning (SEL), Dee Fink's Taxonomy of Significant Learning, and gameful pedagogy. Each has useful strategies for the students, courses, and faculty they are targeting, but falls short when it comes to broad application as they are currently being implemented.

Other widespread instructional design approaches also support components of SDT but do not have the explicit goal of supporting psychological growth. For example, strategies from Universal Design for Learning (i.e. multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression) support aspects of SDT like autonomy and competence, but its primary focus is on creating an accessible learning environment (Tobin & Behling, 2018). Active learning, commonly seen in the form of "flipped classes" can support all aspects of SDT depending on how it is implemented, but the primary focus and research of active learning is on cognitive and skill growth (Dunlosky et al., 2013; Freeman et al., 2014; Brown et al., 2014; Talbert, 2017). These strategies along with their goals are cross-referenced with the course design approaches that support the elements of self-determination theory—autonomy, competence, and

relatedness—in the *Purposeful Course Design Tool*, Appendix A. In the tool, column A shows how to design for curricular alignment, column B shows how to design for cognitive and skill-based learning, and column C shows how to design for student flourishing. This shows that the updated course design model is *an addition to and supportive of* other research-based course design models that target other student necessities. Together, they create purposeful course design. The Purposeful Course Design Tool is part of the work that the AR team developed and evaluated for efficacy, along with the Purposeful Teaching Fellowship that introduced this tool to faculty. There are more specifics on the tool and fellowship in Chapter 3.

## Course Design for Student Flourishing

### *Social-emotional Learning (SEL)*

Social-emotional Learning (SEL) is an approach to learning that emphasizes the importance of emotional intelligence and social-emotional competencies in well-being and academic success. Primarily seen in K-12 education, and supported by the Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL competencies are associated with skills like coping strategies, critical thinking, self and social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These are connected to the purpose of increasing life satisfaction (Weissberg et al., 2015; Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2016; Corcoran et al, 2018; Turan, 2021; Collaboration for academic, social, and emotional learning [CASEL], 2023), which is an aspect of flourishing.

SEL is comprised of both universal interventions, which are included in many K-12 curriculums across the United States, and focused interventions. Universal interventions are intended to provide preventative strategies and tools to young people so that as difficulties arise, they have the coping skills needed to persevere. Focused interventions are used to support

students who are at risk or already experiencing social, emotional, or behavioral problems (Humphrey, 2013; Weissberg et al., 2015; Collaboration for academic, social, and emotional learning [CASEL], 2023; Take 5! Self-reg, 2023).

SEL classroom activities are designed to promote the SEL competencies listed above. Examples include holding a daily morning meeting and greeting, using team or partner tasks, learning to work in a group, and promoting kindness and appreciation (e.g. having students "fill a bucket" for other students with messages of kindness, appreciation, etc.), practicing problem-solving, talking about coping strategies for different emotions, writing in reflection journals, teaching mediation skills, playing games to build community and more (Durgen, 2022; Mulvahill, 2022; Collaboration for academic, social, and emotional learning [CASEL], 2023; Take 5! Self-reg, 2023).

In connection to flourishing and self-determination theory, SEL competencies support psychological growth and well-being, especially around the area of relatedness and personal growth. What makes this specific strategy more difficult in many higher-education settings is that it seems geared towards interventions throughout the day as seen in a K-12 setting, including the time between learning activities, and most college class schedules do not account for this time. Strategies like problem-solving and reflection are represented in other research around learning, and being cognizant about looking for opportunities to include some of these interventions could be helpful in developing SEL strategies for a college classroom.

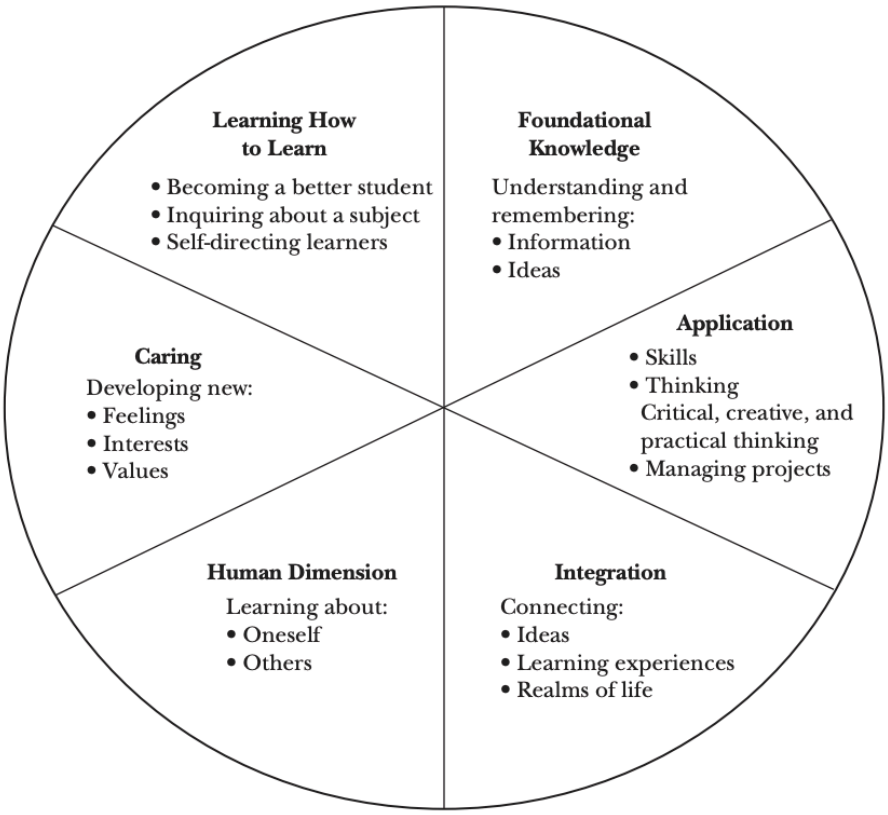
*Dee Fink's Taxonomy of Significant Learning*

As the Director of the Instructional Development Program at the University of Oklahoma, Dee Fink worked to address the curricular problems of learning goals that were not going beyond learning and remembering and teaching practices that were not going beyond

lecturing and discussions by developing a “taxonomy of significant learning”, illustrated in Figure 1 below (2013, p. 35).

**Figure 1**

*Taxonomy of Significant Learning*




As seen in his diagram, Foundational Knowledge encompasses remembering and understanding, Application and Integration address learning outcomes that are also seen in higher-order learning in Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy, a standard guide for developing course learning outcomes (Anderson et al., 2001; Wilson, 2016), but Fink also includes three additional dimensions—Human Dimension, Caring, and Learning How to Learn. These last three dimensions are closely tied to the SDT aspects of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Fink states, “One important

feature of this taxonomy is that it is not hierarchical, but rather relational and even interactive…each kind of learning is related to the other kinds of learning and that achieving any one kind of learning simultaneously enhances the possibility of achieving the other kinds of learning as well" (2013, p. 37). General course goals created to guide course development with this approach are:

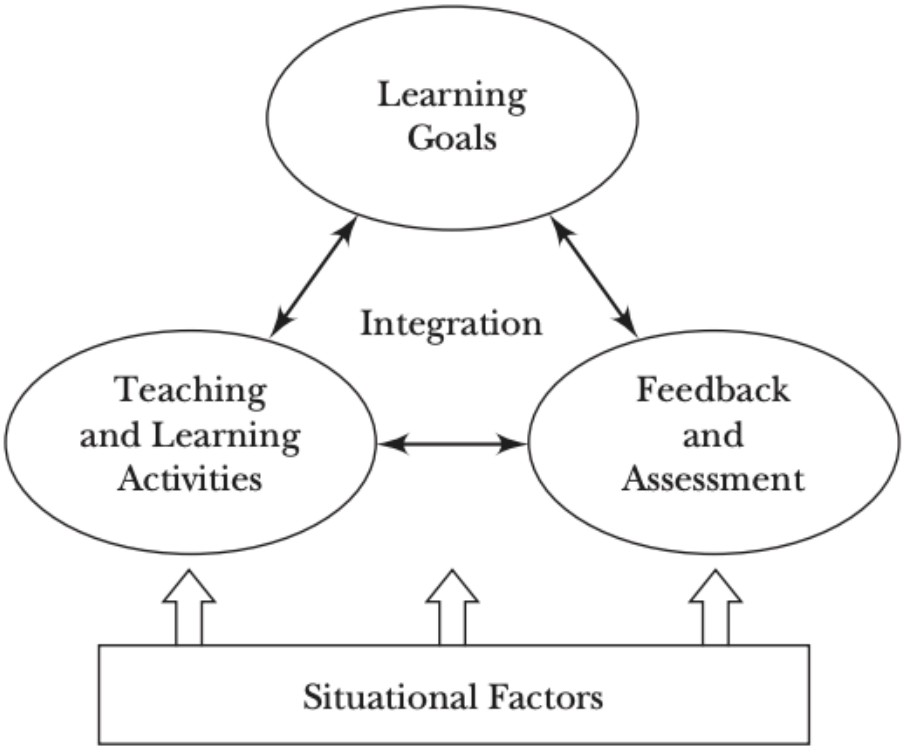
By the end of this course, students will…

- Understand and remember key concepts, terms, relationships, and so on.
- Know how to use the content
- Be able to relate this subject to other subjects.
- Understand the personal and social implications of knowing about this subject.
- Care about the subject (and about learning more on the subject).
- Know how to keep on learning about this subject after the course is over (p. 39)

From a course design perspective, Fink proposes an "integrated course design approach", illustrated by his diagram replicated in Figure 2 below (2013, p. 70).

**Figure 2**

*Key Components of Integrated Course Design*




This figure shows how learning goals, teaching and learning activities, and feedback and assessment are all interrelated for significant learning to occur, but it also includes a space for situational factors like 1) The context of the course—upper level or intro? Large or small?; 2) Expectations of external groups—program, state, societal expectations; 3) Nature of the subject; 4) Characteristics of the learners; 5) Characteristics of the teacher; 6) Special pedagogical

challenge. Fink then goes on to outline a 12-step course development process broken up into three phases:

Initial Phase: Build Strong Primary Components.

1. Identify important situational factors.
2. Identify important learning goals.
3. Formulate appropriate feedback and assessment procedures.
4. Select effective teaching and learning activities.
5. Make sure the primary components are integrated.

Intermediate Phase: Assemble the components into a coherent whole.

6. Create a thematic structure for the course.
7. Select or create a teaching strategy.
8. Integrate the course structure and the instructional strategy to create an overall scheme of learning activities.

Final Phase:

9. Develop the grading system.
10. Debug the possible problems.
11. Write the course syllabus.
12. Plan an evaluation of the course and of your teaching. (pp. 74-75).

There are several strengths to this approach to course design, the first being the expansion of course goals to include caring and the human dimension which reflect elements of flourishing-valuing interests and goals, connection to oneself and to others. The integrated course design illustration effectively shows how course goals, teaching and learning opportunities, and

feedback and assessment are connected, as well as accounting for situational differences in courses. In the context of this study, I appreciate how the course learning goals are developed to account for a broader connection to the discipline, self and topic in general. That being said, a 12-step process for course development is not likely something that most faculty will have the time or patience to work through, and while it is likely courses that work through this process have great outcomes, when the goal is to change the baseline standard, this is an overly complex process.

*Gameful Pedagogy*

Gameful pedagogy, also seen as gameful learning, is a course design approach that uses motivation and engagement theories used in game design and applies them to an educational environment. Not to be confused with educational games, where the content is put into a game format, gameful pedagogy uses game mechanics like rewards for competence (e.g. points, badges) and often pulls from the self-determination theory concepts of autonomy, competence (challenge), and relatedness to deliver a course that students can move through with choice, at a pace that is appropriate to their level of knowledge and as a community of learners. A critical component of gameful pedagogy is that students are always building points from zero and "leveling up" by completing activities and challenges. In traditional classes, grades are often on a 100% scale and students essentially lose points once they begin a class and make a mistake. This doesn't provide space to learn by experimenting, freedom to fail etc., like you might in a gaming environment (Ajlen et al., 2020; Brunvand & Hill, 2019; Christo et al., 2015; Jones, 2020). Recent research indicates that gameful course design supports autonomy and increased feelings of competence, but it is not clear how much it affects student motivation at the course level (Jones, 2020).

The gameful approach to education is being adopted incrementally at several universities throughout the United States. The University of Michigan developed a learning management system to support gameful course design called Gradecraft (Welcome to Gradecraft, 2022) which can be licensed to use at other institutions. American University has an American University Game Lab that looks at experimental education, play research and playful interactions, others include the Center for Games and Impact at Arizona State University; The CUNY Game Network—A Center for Game-Based Learning; Games for Entertainment and Learning (GEL) at Michigan State University; The MAGIC Center (Media, Arts, Games, Interaction and Creativity) at Rochester Institute of Technology; and more (Game Labs and Centers, 2021).

The strengths of the gameful learning course design approach are that it addresses all the self-determination theory needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in an ongoing way to support learning. This is a great design to use in content-heavy courses where students likely need to move through the material at different speeds, have different levels of competency starting out, and need to spend time with the skills and content for long-term retention. Because of the time-intensive nature of developing a course with multiple levels of opportunities for exploration, practice, feedback, etc., it is most impactfully used in courses where the time it takes to develop the material will have a large pay-off in terms of the number of students taking the course. This would be high-enrollment, multi-section courses like foundational or "gateway" courses. Most notably, supporting competency through a positive, leveling-up approach as opposed to a make-or-break approach to joining a major could positively impact enrollment in programs that traditionally lose a lot of students after the first year, like STEM fields.

**Flourishing in the Classroom**

Connecting elements of flourishing directly into the classroom is already happening in some individual classes across the United States. These strategies included integrating the topic of flourishing and its values into the curriculum itself, outdoor excursions and programming, community service, and civic engagement.

One undergraduate business class went beyond the traditional ways of incorporating sustainability into their curricula to consider how flourishing can be a strategy to improve sustainability in business. The course was designed to begin to change the mindset and behavior of the students to develop leaders that can move towards sustainability as flourishing. This requires the exposure to and development of "good habits of thinking and acting for the common good which closely resemble the notion of virtue" (McGhee & Grant, 2016, p. 87).

Another example of a program that puts students flourishing at its core is a 13-day outdoor education program in upstate New York (Shellman & Hill, 2017). Based on a previous successful study reporting significant mental health benefits from outdoor programming (Mutz, 2016), this program is a required component of the recreation, parks and leisure studies program. While this might seem like a self-selected group, anecdotally not all students are excited or enthusiastic about participating in this program prior to going. Much of the program is based around community building, emphasizing the social well-being and relationships component of flourishing, and skill-building – overlapping with a sense of independence and competence. At the conclusion of the 13 days, there were statistically significant gains (+.56) from pre-course to post-course on mental health and well-being. Based on these positive results, the authors argue that including outdoor programming should be a required component in higher-ed rather than an option or add-on (Shellman & Hill, 2017). While this might not be reasonable to include in every

class, certainly individual programs could look at where this type of experiential learning could be included in the curriculum, or it could be explored as a college/university core requirement.

Another area to explore that proves to have a lot of potential based on current programs and reported student interest is community-engaged programming. As seen in several studies, connection to community and civic engagement have high correlations to flourishing (Swaner, 2007; Low, 2011; Byron, 2014; Fink, 2014; Brewer et al., 2018). In one study it was found that

> There were significant differences in the expected direction in ratings of importance of service, community, understanding the problems facing our society, national challenges, global awareness, and political involvement, with students categorized as flourishing having the highest importance ratings for these dimensions related to civic and community engagement (Low, 2011, p. 558).

This would indicate that including more civic or community engagement opportunities directly in a course or curriculum could also support student flourishing. Though examples of this area are less specific, from a course design perspective community-engaged learning is something that has a lot of different options across disciplines and ties into other learning strategies like elaboration, connection to self, and authenticity (Ambrose et al., 2010).

**Creativity and Flourishing**

While not all elements that support flourishing are something that can be embedded in an academic course, there are some components that can. Not examined in the courses above, creativity, and stemming from creativity, creative genius consists of behaviors that indicate positive mental health. Although this can quickly become a gray area to try to develop and grade, defining creativity as producing something new or novel, adaptive to the problem at hand, and complete in its execution (Cassandro & Simonton, 2003) are criteria that instructors could

consider incorporating into their classes. Creativity in education has a long history dating back to the 19th and early 20th centuries in the development of kindergarten by Froebel, the Montessori approach, Dewey's emphasis on inquiry and experience, and Schiller's work on creative impulse and play. From the humanist perspectives of Maslow and Rogers, creativity was the "fullest realization of the human spirit, a fulfilling peak experience" (Sawyer, 2015, p. 2). Existentialist and positive psychologists have also found that participating in intrinsically motivating activities also supports happiness and well-being. Sawyer (2015) says, "True creativity required specific classroom designs and teacher behaviors; the teacher's role is a facilitator and fellow collaborate, joining the students in a process of knowledge building" (p. 10). Advice he compiled from several researchers of creativity including Craft, Fleith, Torrence, and more, spanning 40 years include, but is not limited to: respect unusual questions and ideas; have students do something without being evaluated; delay grading until the process is complete; encourage humor, questions and risk-taking; encourage idea generation; provide opportunities to think across disciplines; provide time for ideas to develop; encourage creative collaboration; encourage students to master factual knowledge because it is an important base for creativity. Although creativity in schools has been studied in-depth, there is very little training in how to develop a course—in K-12 or higher education – that focuses on fostering creativity outside of the arts.

Taking creativity a step further, creative genius—someone who produces something that is both creative as defined by the above criteria, and impactful at a societal level—can only exist when creativity can flourish. Not just high intelligence around known knowledge, but high intelligence around the creation of new knowledge or ways of being. The genius needs to be a great promotor and communicator to get people at large to buy into their novel idea (Cassandro

& Simonton, 2003). These ways of thinking, communicating, and approaching problems could be included in a course or curriculum.

## Purpose and Research Questions

The project purpose and ultimate change I would like to see from this action research (AR) study at Ely University is increased awareness, support, and implementation of strong course design based on research around personal growth, well-being, and learning. The research purpose of this project is to study the efficacy of educational choices and strategies based on self-determination theory (SDT) to see if they improve student flourishing in a selective university curriculum. The function of a university is to provide an education so that students can be increasingly skilled, empowered, confident, and reflective citizens as they enter the workforce. Through the updated course design model, the ultimate goal is to improve students' educational success from both a cognitive and psychological perspective.

For students to flourish, faculty need to flourish as well, therefore, it is necessary to create a course design support system that simultaneously addresses the student's educational needs while still meeting the faculty's own needs for autonomy, competency, and relatedness. The reality is that faculty are extremely busy and often pulled in multiple directions at once. The challenge of moving faculty and administrators away from the traditional independent approach of teaching based on prior experience, gut feelings, and curricular independence to a more structured, research-based model that is inherently collaborative is not to be understated. At an R1 university like Ely University, there is pressure to secure funding, publish, present at conferences, and more. Promotions and tenure decisions are not usually based on teaching effectiveness. Therefore, it is critical that the course design model is easily accessible and implementable so that even the busiest faculty can implement it. My research questions are:

1. To what extent do students' senses of autonomy, competence, and relatedness change when using the Purposeful Course Design model?
2. What is learned at the individual, group, and system levels that advanced the theory and practice in an action research project about including the elements of autonomy, competence, and relatedness of Self-Determination Theory in courses to support student flourishing?

**Theoretical Framework**

My theoretical framework, Figure 3, illustrates that Ely University has a need to support flourishing directly in the courses themselves so that all students benefit. To do this, I defined flourishing concretely emphasizing students' needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness from self-determination theory (SDT) as the necessary components of flourishing. SDT is comprised of biological, social, and cultural factors that support human capacities for psychological growth, wellness, and engagement. It proposes that people's basic needs for *autonomy* – the need for choice; *competence* – the need to feel capable; and *relatedness* – the need for belonging to social groups and connecting to the world around them–need to be met for psychological growth and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2019). Both practical and critical, Ryan and Deci (2017) state:

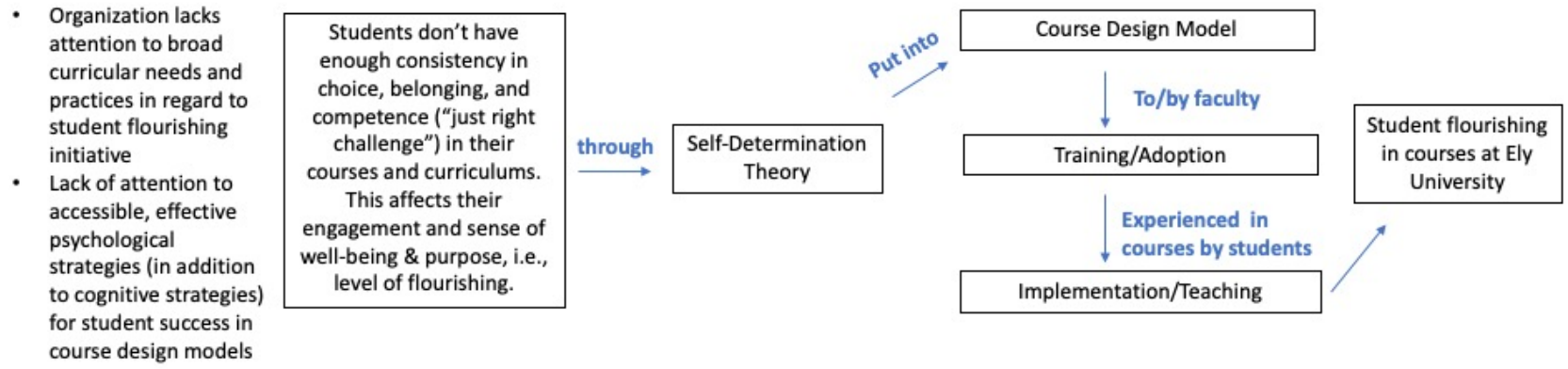
> By identifying (and measuring) varied types of motivational regulation and the conditions that foster them, SDT can be thoughtfully and systematically applied within varied social contexts, including families, classrooms, sports teams, health clinics, interactive media, and workplaces. At the same time, SDT is inherently *critical* insofar as it examines and compares social contexts in terms of their adequacy in supporting versus impairing

human thriving (p. 4).

Then, I developed an updated course design model and strategies with my AR team that includes an additional emphasis on 1) autonomy through student choice and autonomy-supportive teaching practices; 2) student belonging and relatedness through building a community of learners, connection to major, connection to interests, connection to communities etc.; 3) competence, a "just right" challenge – classes are not too difficult that students feel frustrated and not too easy that they feel bored – students are in the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978). The AR team tested the Purposeful Course Design model in their courses and then we developed a fellowship to train other faculty which included implementing strategies from the model into their courses, ideally arriving at student flourishing.

**Figure 3**

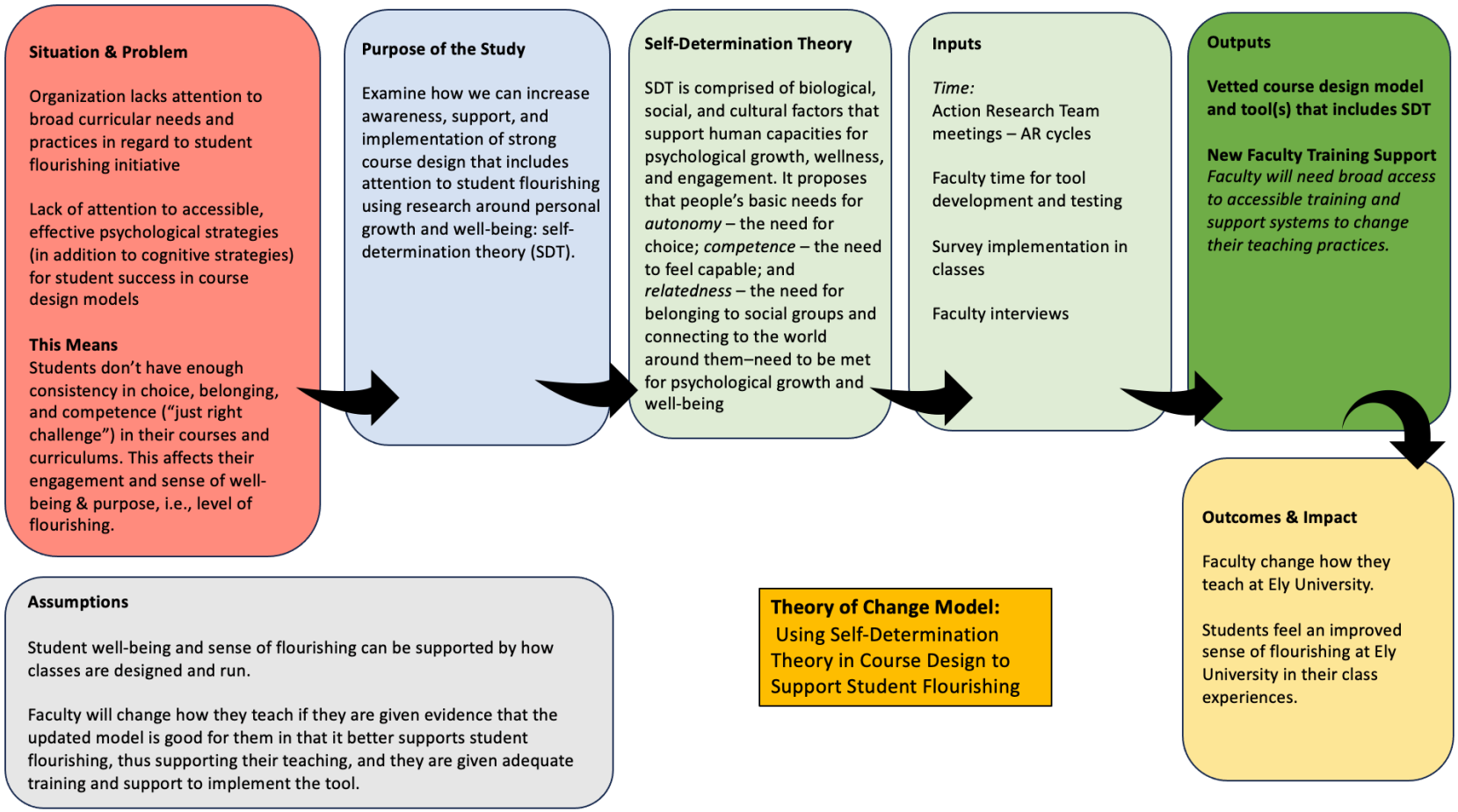
*Theoretical Framework for Student Flourishing*



In implementing this model with faculty, we needed to be equally mindful of faculty flourishing – for students to flourish, faculty must also flourish--and therefore the updated models and tools for faculty also supported their sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The Theory of Change Model in Figure 4 further illustrates the framework of this study.

**Figure 4**

*Theory of Change Model*



## Self-Determination Theory and Student Flourishing

As stated, research in Self-Determination Theory is comprised of biological, social, and cultural factors that support human capacities for psychological growth, wellness, and engagement. SDT is an "organismic perspective" and "assumes that humans have evolved to be inherently curious, physically active, and deeply social beings" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 4). This implies that people are motivated to take charge of their learning by interacting with their environment and those around them, by exploring and manipulating what they see as relevant and important for their personal growth. From this, SDT extracted three important components for intrinsic motivation: autonomy – the need for choice; competence – the need to feel capable; and relatedness – the need for belonging to social groups and connecting to the world around them (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Flourishing, specifically, comes out of psychological growth, engagement, and wellness, which is why it can be directly connected to SDT. To promote psychological well-being and thus flourishing in a classroom, courses should be designed around the three critical components of SDT – autonomy, competence, and relatedness—but also keep in mind underlying factors that drive the needs of curiosity, physical activity, and socializing with others.

As noted, for growth, people need an environment that supports these basic needs, but if, by contrast, the environment is need-thwarting, the opposite occurs. SDT is largely experience-dependent, where positive outcomes rely on satisfactory environments. Classrooms are designed experiences and environments, and this is where paying close attention to what creates a thriving versus a thwarting environment can be critical not only to student learning, but to student flourishing as well. Unfortunately, in traditional college classrooms and learning environments, need-thwarting practices like traditional lecturing with a few exams, rank-based grading, and

inattention to the learning community are all too common (Tagg, 2019; Gooblar, 2021).

Table 2 provides a list of empirical studies that have been included in the literature review on self-determination theory in educational settings.

**Table 2**

*Empirical Studies: Self-Determination Theory applied in educational settings*

| Study | Theme | Sample | Methodology | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Characteristics of the rewarder and intrinsic motivation of the rewardee, Deci, Edward L.; Nezlek, John; Sheinman, Louise (1981) | To compare characteristics of controlled educational environments verses autonomy-supportive educational environments. | 35 classrooms grades 4, 5, 6, in four elementary schools in 1977. Final analysis had 610 children. | Qualitative survey methods with In-class surveys. | Within the first six weeks of a class, the relationship between the children's intrinsic motivation and self-esteem was established and remained fairly constant the rest of the semester. Autonomy-oriented teachers correlated with improved intrinsic motivation and controlling-oriented teachers correlated with lower intrinsic motivation. |
| Origins and pawns in the classroom: Self-report and projective assessments of individual differences in children's perceptions, Ryan, Richard M. & Grolnick, Wendy S. (1986) | Children's perceptions of the degree to which their school environment supported autonomy or was controlling. | 140 elementary school children from a suburban Rochester, New York, district. There were 74 boys and 66 girls in this sample, drawn from nine classrooms, three each of the 4th through 6th grades. | Qualitative survey methods with In-class surveys. | Children who perceived the classroom environment as "origins" promoting-active, instrumental, etc. reported that they had high self-esteem, perceived cognitive competence, mastery motivation, greater control over outcomes, and less controlled by "powerful others" like the teacher. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Providing a Rationale in an Autonomy-Supportive Way as a Strategy to Motivate Others During an Uninteresting Activity, Reeve, Johnmarshall; Jang, Hyungshim; Hardre, Pat; Omura, Mafumi (2002) | Can a motivation control for an uninteresting activity provided in an autonomy-supportive way help the person see value in the effort they put forth during the uninteresting activity. | 10 college students (102 females, 38 males) in sections of an introductory educational psychology class at a large midwestern university. | Experimental with control groups with differentiated lesson instructions and qualitative survey. | Extrinsically motivated behaviors can become self-determined if there is a autonomy-supportive rationale for the value of the effort put forth. |
| What makes lessons interesting? The role of situational and individual factors in three school subjects, Tsai, Yi-Miau; Kunter, Mareike; Ludtke, Oliver; Trautwein, Ulrish; Ryan, Richard, M. (2008) | Does an autonomy-supportive environment impact students' interest in a subject? | 261 7th grade students in Germany followed over a 3-week period | Repeated lesson-specific assessment questionnaire; in-class survey. | Autonomy-supportive climates and perceived cognitive autonomy support increase student interest, especially if they didn't start with high internal interest. |
| Engaging students in learning activities: It is not autonomy support or structure but autonomy support and structure, Jang, Hyungshim; Reeve, Johnmarshall; Deci, Edward L. (2010) | Is student engagement highest when both an autonomy-supportive environment and structured environment are present? | 133 public high-school classrooms in the mid-west were observed; 1,584 students in grades 9-11 surveyed | Observations and analysis, surveys. | Autonomy support and structure both were positively correlated with and predicted students' behavioral engagement. Only autonomy support was a unique predictor of students' self-reported engagement. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student autonomy and course value: The unique and cumulative, Haerens, Leen; Aelterman, Nathalie; Van den Berghe, Lynn; De Meyer, Jotie; Soenens, Bart; Vansteenkiste, Maarten (2013) | The impact of relatedness and autonomy support, and structure on student motivation. | 74 teachers, PE lessons total; 43 secondary schools in Belgium | Observations of 21 need-supportive behaviors and a questionnaire | Findings imply that the more frequent the implementation of the strategy to support autonomy, relatedness, and structure before and activity, the better the educational outcomes. |
| Student autonomy and course value: The unique and cumulative roles of various teacher practices, Patall, E. A.; Dent, A. L.; Oyer, M.; Wynn, S. R. (2013) | The study examined the role of the three basic psychological needs for the decline of academic intrinsic motivation in an accelerated longitudinal cohort design among teenaged students. | 1 high school in the southeast, 30 classes, 278 students | background questionnaire, school experiences questionnaire | When students perceived that teachers identified the importance and usefulness of coursework and considered students' interests and opinion when creating class activities, student's autonomy need satisfaction was the highest. Giving students choice and perspective-taking increased course value for the students. |
| The decline of academic motivation during adolescence: an accelerated longitudinal cohort analysis on the effect of psychological need satisfaction, Gnambs, Timo; Hanfstingl, Barbara (2016) | The study examined the role of the three basic psychological needs for the decline of academic intrinsic motivation in an accelerated longitudinal cohort design among teenaged students. | 600 students ages 11-16 from 52 secondary school in rural and urban Austria. | Survey | Two conclusions: 1) intrinsic motivation gradually declined between the ages of 11 and 16 years. 2) academic intrinsic motivations do not change considerably but remain rather stable when the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs are accounted for. |

## Self-Determination Theory in the Classroom

### *Autonomy*

Of the three elements of Self-Determination Theory, autonomy in education has been the most studied. Different aspects include autonomy-supportive environments, structural elements like grading, evaluation and mastery, and teaching practices. Some strategies that support student autonomy also support competence and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Many studies have been completed around "autonomy-supportive" versus "controlling" environments in educational settings concluding that the more students felt they had a choice in how they participated in the course, the more perceived self-worth, intrinsic motivation, and cognitive competence they had. Overall, students tended to learn better. This was found in students from primary school through college in multiple countries (e.g., Deci et al., 1981; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986; Jang et al., 2010; Gnambs & Hanfstingl, 2016; Reeve et al., 2002; Tsai et al., 2008). Based on a Reeve and Jang (2006) study, Ryan and Deci (2017, p. 368) compiled the table below to highlight teacher behaviors that promote autonomous motivation versus teacher behaviors that promote controlled motivation.

**Table 3**

*Teacher Behaviors Shown Empirically to Be Autonomy-Supportive, and Those Shown to Be Controlling*

| Teaching behaviors that promote autonomous motivation | Teaching behaviors that promote controlled motivation |
|---|---|
| • Listening to students<br>• Making time for students' independent work<br>• Giving students an opportunity to talk<br>• Acknowledging signs of improvement and mastery<br>• Encouraging students' effort<br>• Offering progress-enabling hints when students seem stuck<br>• Being responsive to students' comments and questions<br>• Acknowledging students' experiences and perspectives | • Monopolizing the learning materials<br>• Providing students too little time to work independently on solving problems<br>• Telling students answers without giving them an opportunity to formulate them<br>• Making demands and directives<br>• Using controlling words such as should and have to<br>• Using directed questions as a way of controlling the flow of conversation |

As seen in the table, strategies to support autonomy in the classroom include things like listening to students and considering their perspectives, giving them time to work and to talk, acknowledging improvement, and providing progress-enabling hints when stuck. Behaviors that lead to a controlling environment are things like not providing enough time for students to work or giving them the answers without allowing time for them to work, making demands or directives, and using direct questions to control the situation. The strategies that support autonomy in the classroom align closely with research-based best practices in cognitive development like active learning and providing continuous feedback, connecting to self, and expanding on known information (Ambrose et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2014), and could easily be emphasized as a way to support both psychological and cognitive growth.

Autonomy in a class should also be closely associated with providing student choice in materials, format, and assessment. This approach helps instructors take students' perspectives into account more often which leads to students seeing the course as more useful and therefore more valuable. Seeing a greater purpose in a course is also connected to relatedness. Providing choice does not mean eliminating structure, in fact, providing structure around things like clear instructions and rationale for choices also promotes feelings of relatedness and competence (Haerens et al., 2013; Patall et al., 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2017). This is closely tied to accessibility, equity, and cognitive concepts in learning found in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practices (Tobin & Behling, 2018). Examples of choice in materials could be providing seven to ten readings, videos, etc. on a topic and asking students to select five to review. If you are teaching a skills-based course like writing, students could have the option to choose the topic that they will be writing about. To provide choice in format, instructors could provide information in several different formats – text, audio, interactive websites. It should also include providing content from a variety of perspectives. It is critical, however, that the choice is not meaningless, for example, a choice between two things a student does not want, or choice with subtle pressure to choose one over the other – this will not promote feelings of autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Autonomy-supportive educational practices also prioritize structure. Structured environments, not to be confused with controlled environments, provide clear, transparent expectations for goals, have consistent rules and guidelines, and provide support for engagement and feedback (Ryan & Deci, 2020). How and what feedback is provided to students influences their success as well. Ryan and Deci (2017) contend that feedback that students receive around their academic performance has two purposes: 1) an informational aspect which helps inform the degree of success they have achieved at meeting a specific competence and/or 2) a controlling

aspect pressuring students towards a specific behavior like “do better”. Informational feedback improves intrinsic motivation, whereas controlling feedback decreases it. A simple example of this can be seen in a study by Kage and Namiki (1990) (as cited in Ryan & Deci, 2017) on how quizzes were corrected in their class. One group had their quizzes graded by the teacher and the grades counted towards the final grade, and one group self-graded their quizzes and the grade did not count towards their final grade. The students whose quizzes were only for informational feedback through self-grading, that is, allowing the student to see what they did or did not know without it impacting their grade, found the course overall more interesting and did better on the final exam. This indicates both improved intrinsic motivation and cognitive growth when feedback during the course was used for informational reasons. Ongoing feedback throughout a course is necessary for learning (Ambrose et. al, 2010; Brown et al., 2014) but attaching a grade to feedback can have the opposite effect. Including more ongoing, ungraded, informational feedback throughout a course would be an easy change to make in a course design model.

The second aspect of grading considered in SDT is similar but has to do directly with grades as opposed to feedback. The function of grades in education typically serves two purposes — competence-relevant feedback and gatekeeping. Competence-relevant feedback should communicate to the student and others what their current skills or abilities are on a specific learning goal (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Like the informational aspect of feedback discussed above, this use of grades should support growth. Gatekeeping, on the other hand, uses grades to stop students from advancing in a subject or curriculum. It uses grades to exclude students which in effect lowers their motivation, impedes their abilities, and leaves them deflated. While it may be a necessity at the end of a program to ensure important standards are met, like in medicine or law, they are not necessary at the beginning of a program. Education should work to support

students' growth even when starting with different innate abilities and experiences, rather them stop them outright.

*Competence*

Ryan & Deci (2020) say "*Competence* concerns the feeling of mastery, a sense that one can succeed and grow. The need for competence is best satisfied within well-structured environments that afford optimal challenges, positive feedback, and opportunities for growth" (p. 1). Competence supports curiosity, exploration, and manipulation—all critical components of learning. Competence is easily thwarted if challenges are too hard, negative feedback is prominent, feelings of mastery or effectiveness are weakened, and through self-criticism or social comparisons (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Rank-based grading as opposed to standards-based grading is an example of social comparisons in higher education that is still all too prominent. Rank-based grading means grades are determined solely based on how students did compared to other students in the class often by putting them on a curve, as opposed to how well they met a specific standard. Moving from rank-based grading to standards-based grading should be implemented in all educational environments. Aside from social comparisons, all the elements to support or diminish competence are things that can be designed for in a learning environment, notably using pedagogical models like exploratory learning, self-directed learning, and problems-based learning (Dirksen, 2016; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

A second theory that is related to competence is Lev Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development. This theory of learning says that there is an optimal zone for learning that is in between tasks that are too easy and tasks that are difficult but can be completed with assistance. When tasks are too easy, students become bored, and when tasks are too difficult students become frustrated. Designing learning tasks that are rigorous—that is having high

expectations for level of achievement and providing ongoing support for the achievement—and "just right" for the learner supports their growth but also supports their feelings of competence (Early et al., 2014, 2016). Something that can make this difficult to design for in a college environment is the fact that students likely differ in what is rigorous or what falls into their zones of proximal development, but by providing choice in how students navigate the material and course—autonomy—instructors can support competence at a variety of learning levels.

Designing for learning levels is a strategy often seen in gameful pedagogy. As described, gameful pedagogy allows students to choose what material to explore, time and space to experiment, and accumulate points throughout the course at their own pace (Calnan, 2016; Brunvand & Hill, 2019; Ajlen et al., 2020). While this might not be a strategy to apply to every course, it can be a useful approach in large introductory courses where students are likely coming in at multiple skill levels. This approach would help each student find the "just right challenge" without being too bored or too challenged, and a good way to support feelings of competence.

*Relatedness*

Relatedness, also referred to as belonging, has to do with people feeling socially connected, feeling cared for by others, and feeling significant among others. It also is connected to people giving to others and being part of larger social organizations. Described as "homonomy" in 1941 by Andras Angyal, "both by feeling connected to close others and by being a significant member of social groups, people experience relatedness and belonging" (Ryan & Deci, 2017 p.11). The term "belonging" was first presented in Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory about motivation in 1943, with belonging being just above basic physical needs like food, water, safety, and security (Maslow, 1943). Similarly, a lot of the language around flourishing is about connection and purpose—both to other people as well as to

values and communities (Keyes, 2002; Seligman, 2011; Byron 2012). Clearly, relatedness as a basic psychological need for human growth and functioning has been seen as critical by numerous psychologists and sociologists for years and should not be ignored when looking at a social psychological area of development like education.

In course design, social connection is often seen in focusing on building a community of learners through icebreakers and introductions at the start of a semester, facilitated discussions, and group work (Arends, 2014; Dirksen, 2016; Elbaum et al., 2002; Talbert, 2017). However, what is often missing in traditional models is helping students connect the course to a larger purpose. How does it relate to the context of the curriculum? How is it relevant to you outside of class? How can you connect it to community-based or experiential learning like internships that you participate in? A cognitive strategy for learning something new is to connect it to something that a person values (Ambrose et. al. 2010; Brown et al., 2014), but it is also a strategy to support relatedness. Similarly, paying attention to course and curricular alignment, that is, providing content in a timely and targeted manner regarding student needs, supports relatedness in the context of the course and the program of study (Early et al., 2014). Developing strategies to increase students' sense of purpose beyond completing a requirement supports flourishing, in addition to strategies that focus on building a strong community of learners.

The importance of considering approaches to support students' overall sense of well-being has been increasing over the last decade. Even before the 2019/2020 COVID pandemic decreased students' ability to socially interact with one another, there was an increase in feelings of alienation and isolation on college campuses. Sociologists Wendy Fischman and Howard Gardner (2022) conducted a five-year study across ten institutions of higher education of varying sizes, demographics, and selectivity, and held over 2000 interviews with students, faculty,

administrators, parents, and alumni in an attempt to "capture the culture" (p. 19) on college campuses. One major and unintentional finding across all campuses was students reporting a decrease in a sense of belonging over the course of college in the areas of academics, peers, and overall institutions. They categorized feedback about students' sense of belonging or alienation into three categories:

> *Academic*: Motivation, achievement, and mastery of academic work; feeling supported by campus adults to pursue academic work; respected and challenged academically; having ownership of one's field of study.
>
> *Peer*: Meaningful connections with other students, evidence of fitting in to a larger social community.
>
> *Institutional:* Affiliation and connectedness to the institution, as well as to the university's overall mission; being invested in the institution; feeling in sympathy with a "school spirit" (p. 205)

Their findings showed that in the students who felt some alienation, it was usually across all three categories. Ely's current focus on student flourishing is generally developing programs around peer and institutional belonging, which is why it is necessary to also be looking at how to develop a greater sense of belonging in the academic sphere, primarily through rethinking how courses are designed and aligned.

**Conclusion**

Self-Determination Theory is a useful theory to support student flourishing in an academic setting because it focuses on psychological needs, which is what is primarily missing from current best practices in course design. The elements of autonomy, competence, and relatedness/belonging are concrete strategies that can be incorporated into course design in a

variety of methods which is necessary for something as broad as education. “Basic psychological needs are important criteria not just because they are drivers of performance outcomes, but because educational environments that support their satisfaction enhance students’ flourishing across an array of cognitive, personal, and social indicators” (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p. 9). By incorporating these strategies directly into courses, student well-being and flourishing should improve.

## Gaps in the Literature

In both the literature around student flourishing in the classroom and self-determination theory in education, there are few models that holistically combine all the elements of cognitive learning, course alignment, and self-determination theory to support both cognitive and psychological well-being and growth in the classroom. While some elements overlap, like giving students a choice in ways to interact with the material, others target specific types of growth. It is important for faculty to design learning experiences that can capture both learning and psychological needs to best support student flourishing in an academic environment. The current models that envelop both types of needs are complex and time-intensive to implement. This study is not trying to downplay the complexity of the work. Rather, it aims to provide faculty with an approachable, accessible model to begin to consider all aspects of student learning and build improved courses that best support students and impact them in ways that will stay with them beyond their time at Ely University.

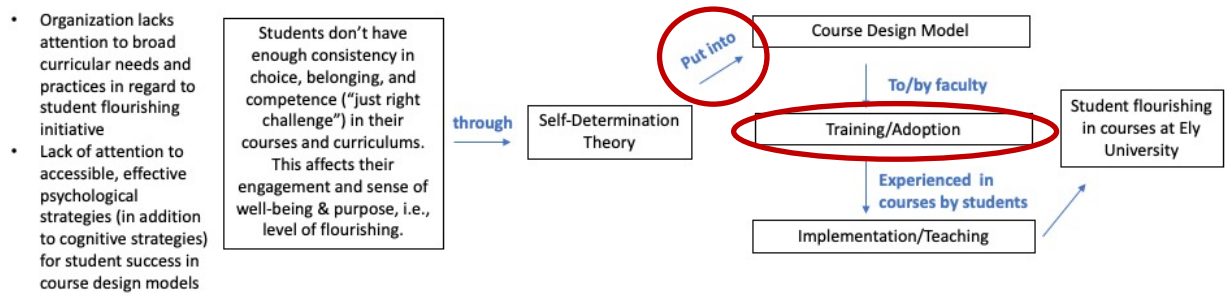
## Conclusion

This study addressed two gaps, circled in Figure 5 below, in the attempt to increase autonomy, competence, and belonging in courses at Ely: 1) The development and testing of an updated course design model that incorporated strategies that support student autonomy,

competence, and belonging. This included making tools that are easy to use and accessible to all faculty; and 2) the exploration of what faculty needed to be able to implement this model at Ely, paying attention to their own need for autonomy, competence, and belonging.

**Figure 5**

*Theoretical Framework for Student Flourishing: Gaps in Institutional Knowledge*




This moves beyond the technical fix of the tool that we will be developing, to the adaptive problem of what it takes to make a culture shift around the importance of teaching and the time and resources it takes to support this initiative at scale.

# CHAPTER 2:

# METHODOLOGY

The project purpose and ultimate change I wanted to see from this action research (AR) study at Ely University was increased awareness, support, and implementation of strong course design based on research around personal growth, well-being, and learning. The research purpose of this project was to study the efficacy of educational choices and strategies based on self-determination theory (SDT) to see if they improved student flourishing as defined in SDT in a selective university undergraduate curriculum. This meant moving faculty and administrators away from the traditional independent approach of teaching based on prior experience, gut feelings, and curricular independence (Schroeder, 2022) to a more structured, research-based model that is inherently collaborative since curriculums are department-based and depend on a team of faculty to implement them. It was my hope that through my AR team and other academic and health professionals, we would develop a pathway toward this cultural shift that will improve students' sense of well-being, purpose, and intellect. I acknowledged that this is a very idealistic shift with many competing values, and may not succeed, but I believed exploring the readiness for change through the AR cycles and Organizational Development (OD) strategies was a worthwhile undertaking. The research questions answered in this study are:

1. To what extent do students' senses of autonomy, competence, and relatedness change when using the Purposeful Course Design model?

2. What is learned at the individual, group, and system levels that advanced the theory and practice in an action research project about including the elements of autonomy, competence, and relatedness of Self-Determination Theory in courses to support student flourishing?

## Research Method

### Action Research Approach

I supported this research through an action research (AR) Organizational Development (OD) change process. Action research is an umbrella term first coined by Kurt Lewin in 1946 that has evolved to embrace many different approaches to investigating culture and organization systems at the personal, group, and institutional level, with the goal to improve practices based on real-time reflection and iterative solutions (Dickens, L. & Watkins, K.E. 1999; Coghlan, 2007; Reason, P., & McArdle, K. L., 2008; Coghlan, 2019; Watkins et al., 2023). Donald Schon (1983) describes this as "the reflective practitioner" in that the person conducting the study is both a researcher and a practitioner of the discipline. Researchers Linda Dickens and Karen Watkins highlight the different approaches to action research by multiple practitioners in their review Action Research: Rethinking Lewin (1999), emphasizing that across all approaches there is a breadth of activities including analysis, fact-finding, planning, execution, and evaluation in a continuous cycle of inquisitive problem-solving. Because action research is based on being both researcher and practitioner, it has three types of approaches or inquiries: first-person inquiry—personal inquiry and introspection into how you function and relate to others in the pursuit of change; second-person inquiry—inquiry by a small group of collaborators with the same goal(s) for improvement or change; and third-person inquiry- inquiry at the institutional level with the

goal to create systematic, holistic change (Coghlan, 2007; Reason, P., & McArdle, K. L., 2008; Coghlan, 2019).

I built a team that is inclusive of multiple perspectives and values, and democratic in our approach to making decisions. To create lasting change, multiple constituencies needed to see worth, needed to see themselves in the change, and needed to have a voice in what happened to them. Competing ideas were brought forward and discussed to promote the generation of new ideas (Hill et al., 2014; Stouten et al., 2018; Coghlan, 2019; Anderson, 2020). Peter Senge's (2006) seminal work *The Fifth Discipline, The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization,* first published in 1990, proposes that to create lasting change, organizations themselves need to be learning organizations. A learning organization, as defined by Senge, is an organization where "people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (p. 3). The five disciplines are *Personal Mastery*, *Mental Models*, *Building a Shared Vision*, *Team Learning*, and *Systems Thinking*. Senge emphasizes that these areas be developed at the same time and work together to function, and this is why *systems thinking* is the fifth disciple—it is a system working together, bridging theory and practice. This was a useful OD approach to take in this project because first, the AR team needed to become independent experts around self-determination theory and effective teaching practices. We dissolved old notions of what college teaching looks like to create space for a new way to be. We worked together to build a shared vision of what we want students to experience in the classroom at Ely University, learned new ways to do this for ourselves and to enroll others in our vision, and in thus doing so, considered how the system itself could be impacted by this project.

**Justification**

Action Research was the right approach for this change effort because to impactfully design for flourishing, it was important to get faculty, student, health professionals, and administrative input and buy-in on what this looks like for Ely students. We not only examined what flourishing looks like and means in an academic setting to overlay it with current best practices in teaching and learning, we also identified implementation strategies that acknowledged competing faculty pressures like publishing, funding, and promotion. Both considerations were adaptive problems that required collaboration, critical analysis, and iteration (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Coghlan, 2019). Adaptive problems have no one right answer. They are complicated and usually involve people's priorities, values, roles and beliefs. They deal with uncertainty and the unknow and you cannot hire an expert to fix them (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Using action research to explore individual, group, and system priorities enabled us to consider and wrestle with competing ideas and learn together through an iterative process.

We used the action research method to develop, pilot, and assess the updated course design model, training, and implementation. We gained institutional interest and aligned the action research cycles with the academic calendar with a critical component taking place each semester—course building, implementation, assessment, building etc. The goal was to support course development with the new model a semester prior to when the course was taught with new faculty each semester. Tightening the model to best support all faculty and learners was an iterative process as we collected feedback from the students and faculty.

The action research team was made up of several faculty from across different departments, an instructional designer, and a student health administrator. Diversity was seen in

discipline, rank, race, gender, culture, and course type (size, discussion-based, content-based). This allowed us to create a design model that is flexible enough to meet a variety of student learning needs and experiences and provide guidance to faculty on how to select the best methods for any chosen course goal. This opt-in group was strong advocates for this project. They were excited about working on the development and implementation of the new model to then share with colleagues. As we present our findings, we hope Ely faculty will be able to identify with at least one type of course that used the new course design model making it easier for them to envision themselves using the new design successfully. The faculty team members were already seen as pedagogical leaders in their departments and have influence over the development of courses and faculty training within their departments. The instructional design and psychology experts on the team bring an additional level of validity to the model.

## Data Collection Methods & Sample

To ensure trustworthiness, data collection in an action research study should come from variety of methods and sources where the data can be triangulated to increase validity (Guion et al., 2011; Watkins et al., 2023). Data related to the first research question, *To what extent does students' senses of autonomy, competence, and relatedness change when using the Purposeful Course Design model* was used to evaluate the efficacy of the design and tools that the AR team developed. All data was used to evaluate what was learned at the individual, group, and systems level about incorporating SDT into a course design model to support student flourishing. Data was collected through interviews, surveys, focus groups, and document collection. See Table 4, below, for an overview of the data collection methods.

**Table 4**
*Data Collection Methods*

| Type of Data Collection | Name | Sample/Participants | Date | Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Document Collection | Personal Journal Entries and Research Notes | 1 Researcher | Sept. 2022 – Jan. 2025 | Individual |
| | Critical Milestone One Reflection Memo | 1 Researcher | May 2023 | Individual |
| | Handouts/tools developed for course design | | Oct. 2023 – Nov. 2025 | System |
| | Notes from intervention (e.g. workshop(s)) | 1 Researcher | March 2024 – April 2024 | System |
| | Transcripts from AR team meetings | 1 Researcher, 5 Action Research Team Members | | Individual, Group, System |
| Interviews | Critical Incident Interviews | 4 Action Research Team Members (faculty) | Oct. 2023 | System |
| | End of Project Semi-structured interviews | 5 Action Research Team Members | Dec. 2024 | Individual, Group, System |
| Focus Groups | Post-fellowship | 3 Focus Groups, 10 Faculty | Dec. 2024 | Individual, Group, System |
| Survey | Pre-survey for students: questions from the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSNF) for students, The Flourishing Scale, and open-ended questions | 8 courses, 147 students | Aug. - Oct. 2024 | Group, System |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pre-survey for faculty: questions from the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSNF) for teachers, The Flourishing Scale, and open-ended questions | 10 faculty | March 2024 | Individual, Group, System |
| Post-survey for students: questions from the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSNF) for students, The Flourishing Scale, and open-ended questions | 8 courses, 98 students | Dec. 2024 | Group, System |
| Pre-survey for faculty: questions from the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSNF) for teachers, The Flourishing Scale, and open-ended questions | 10 faculty | Dec. 2024 | Individual, Group, System |

## Methods

### *Document Collection*

Document collection in action research is often used for dependability—e.g. an audit trail of the process—and to examine growth and change in both the project and the meta-learning of the researcher (Coghlan, 2019; Watkins et al., 2023). In this study, documents collected and analyzed for themes and patterns were personal journal entries of the researcher, Critical Milestones One and Two, handouts and tools developed for the fellowship program, meeting and group notes, notes from interventions, and emails. The research weakness in documents like journals is the fact that personal biases are involved so it is important to consider reflexivity and how these biases played a role (Creswell, 2015; Watkins et al., 2023). Triangulation can help reduce the bias of documents as well.

### *Critical Incident Interviews*

Critical incident interviews were conducted to collect preliminary data about what makes faculty feel like they and their students are flourishing. This approach was chosen to begin to identify faculty and student needs that can be aligned with the updated course review tool. After collecting stories, or incidents, from different faculty members about their experiences as both instructors and students, data-reduction methods like re-storying were used to then do a cross-incident analysis to look for thematic assertions (Watkins et al., 2022). The data collected from the thematic assertions helps validate the need for this study.

Four interviews were completed which resulted in 13 critical incidents. These interviews were conducted with the Action Research team, so informed consent was already given. Between the four faculty AR team members, a wide variety of disciplines and courses were covered, however, they did not encapsulate the complete breadth of offerings and Ely University. Perhaps

not a limitation, but a second thing to consider is the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessary changes in teaching methods that the on-campus closure required – e.g. online teaching with little preparation, large class sizes online. etc. - was less than three years prior to these interviews and did have a big impact on some of the incidents. Still, thematic assertions could be drawn from the lack of control faculty had over the situation itself and the type of learning environment it created.

*Semi-structured Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews are used to ask open-ended questions to collect qualitative feedback (Creswell, 2015). In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to collect feedback from the AR team at the project's conclusion. I used deductive variables about individual, group, and systems learning to identify what was learned. Within these parameters, I looked for inductive variables to help hone in on the themes within the learning. To help determine the themes/inductive codes I first read through all the transcripts to clean them up and look for patterns and themes. I pulled quotes that stood out to me under each of the learning themes to help cluster concepts (Miles et al., 2020). This helped me create categories about individual, group, and systems learning. A major theme that emerged immediately was that for students to flourish faculty need to flourish, so I mapped the themes that were found in the learning about faculty flourishing to help determine what it is that faculty need to flourish.

*Focus Group*

Focus groups were used to collect multiple perspectives about the Purposeful Course Design resources, fellowship, and course implementation. Data collected from the focus groups was used to triangulate individual, group and systems learning as well as the impact of purposeful course design on student flourishing. A limitation of focus groups is that the

participants' answers may be influenced by the answers of others, so it is important that other data-collection methods as used as well (Creswell, 2015).

*Surveys*

Surveys can be used to collect quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2015). This study used surveys to collect student pre- and post-course experiences related to the elements of autonomy, competence, and relatedness and asked what flourishing in a class means to them. To examine the premise that for students to flourish faculty need to flourish, we also collected faculty pre- and post-fellowship experiences related to the elements of autonomy, competence, and relatedness regarding their teaching obligations at Ely University. The quantitative questions are from the *Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS)* for school/students and school/teachers (Van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2020) and the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2009).

The BPNSFS was originally developed in 2015 and validated in four culturally diverse settings, both western and non-western, ensuring the questions meant the same thing in four different languages, “thereby providing evidence for the measurement equivalence of the retained set” (Van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2020, p. 6). The first domain-specific tool was validated in 2015 for a physical education sample and has since been developed into many domain-specific questionnaires for areas like healthcare, education, work, and relationships (Van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2020). The reliability of an instrument means that “scores from an instrument are stable and consistent” (Creswell, 2015, p. 159). The number of multicultural, linguistic, and domain-specific validated instruments adapted from the original demonstrates that this is a reliable measure.

The Flourishing Scale was developed in 2010 (Diener et al.) and this first study says "The brief Flourishing Scale performed well, with high reliabilities and high convergence with similar scales. It correlated strongly with the summed scores for the other psychological well-being scales, at .78 and .73…providing a good assessment for self-reported overall psychological well-being" (p. 153). However, it notes that it does not assess the individual component of what creates overall well-being, and for that, another scale would be needed. One of the scales this initial study analyzed for correlation regarding well-being was Ryan and Deci's general Basics Needs Satisfaction scale, from which the BPNSFS was derived, which showed a high correlation of .54 to .67. The Flourishing Scale has since been validated in many countries – New Zealand, Portugal, Japan, China, France, Germany, and Spain (Checa et al., 2018) demonstrating that it is a reliable measure for overall psychological flourishing.

Minor changes were made to a few questions on the BPNSFS to provide more clarity around a higher education context. Two open-ended questions are included on both surveys to gain a better understanding of what students and faculty think it is to flourish in a classroom setting. This qualitative data is important to include in the analysis of our major inquiry into the effect of incorporating the aspects of self-determination theory into a classroom setting.

Four courses in Spring 2024 gave the student surveys thereby collecting pre-data and testing the tool. These were courses that the AR team taught. While their courses did not undergo a complete redesign, they incorporated some small changes from the purposeful course design model and we were able to analyze the results.

Of the ten faculty who participated in the Purposeful Teaching Fellowship, eight gave this survey to their students in Fall 2024. One fellow ended up co-teaching her course in Summer 2024 with a low post-survey rate so we did not include this data in the calculation. Another

fellow forgot to give it to her students in class and didn't provide a link out of class. (Just to note, this faculty member had a good experience in the fellowship and reported student success, so it does not appear that not giving the survey had any correlation with having a negative experience in the program.) A total of 147 students completed the pre survey and 98 completed the post survey. This included both graduate and undergraduate students.

## Rigor and Trustworthiness

Rigor and trustworthiness in action research are grounded in both inquiry and implementation (Argyris, 1996; Coghlan & Shani, 2014). It is generating actionable knowledge that is defensible and publishable (Checkland & Holwell, 1998; Coghlan & Shani, 2014). Coghlan and Shani (2014) describe it as "practical knowing" (p. 526) that, "as contrasted with scientific knowing which seeks to create universal knowledge directs us to the concerns of human living and the successful performance of daily tasks and discovering solutions that work" (p. 526). Checkland and Howell (1998) say, "the only certain object of research becomes the change process itself" (p.11). Chris Argyris contends that external validity in action research is based on "causality"—knowledge that is relevant to the rest of the world—and critical to any action research study. He states, "I believe that the task of any theory of managing is to produce generalizations that are actionable by managers in everyday life and that as managers use such generalizations, they create opportunities for robust tests of their validity" (p. 390). He continues,

> The generalizations should inform the users not only what is likely to happen under certain conditions but how to create the conditions and actions in the first place. Otherwise, the generalizations are not actionable. (p. 392).

> …Propositions that are intended to be used in the world of practice, if used correctly, should lead to the predicted consequences and not to others that are counter to those predicted …
>
> …The generalizations should be usable over time and under different conditions while, at the same time, usable in the individual case. (p. 394).

The research I conducted encapsulated all the above descriptors. I worked with my team to generate course design knowledge that any faculty can use to support an educational environment where students can flourish. Coghlan and Shani (2014) assert, "Action research builds on the past, takes place in the present with a view of shaping the future" (p. 526). Through the cycles of action research, my team used the information we had about students at Ely University and the team's own experiences with students from the past to help shape our actions of the present which we then evaluated in hopes of shaping the actions of the future. This ensured that we included varying perspectives and interpretations of data and events to support the validity and rigor of the research process (Cohen et al. 2011; Coghlan & Shani, 2014; Anderson, 2020).

Core characteristics of rigor in action research include 1) intentionality of the researcher to change the organization; 2) theory informing the design and actions in the process; 3) transparency in choices to all constituents, including the broad distribution of the knowledge gained; 4) decisions that are data-driven, information gathered through multi methods, co-evaluation, causality, and publishability (Argyris, 1996; Melrose, 2001; Cohen et al. 2011; Coghlan & Shani, 2014). The action research team and I followed these guidelines closely to ensure that the work we did was rigorous and valid. As the project leader, I began by opening the discussion of intentionality to the core group which continued to transform based on the team's

experiences and desires. We used multiple methods of research to collect data throughout the project including surveys, interviews, focus groups, and reflection journals. Theory in learning and flourishing guided our decisions and actions. I created a trustworthy research environment by building trust through dialogue within the core group. Trustworthiness within the project in general was established by being completely transparent about the research process, the decisions made, the triumphs, and the failures. The cyclical nature of action research allows, indeed, requires, that level of transparency to generate new actionable knowledge. We are looking to publish and/or present our findings both within our university and the higher-education community at large.

## Subjectivity Statement

Being a researcher in a system where I am also a specialist, I was aware of the differing perspectives and levels of expertise that likely impacted this work. At the start of this work, I had a much broader depth of knowledge than the AR team in effective teaching practices and had to make sure that this did not 1) make me move too quickly or assume they knew what I was talking about when we discussed different strategies and terminologies and 2) I was not dismissive of work they had done in their classrooms that was based on “gut” or “feeling”. Even though they may not have been trained on specific teaching strategies or know the research behind what makes something effective, it does not mean it does not connect to research-affirmed strategies–sometimes it does, sometimes it does not. On the contrary, in this research work, it is likely that a “gut feeling” is filling one of the basic needs of autonomy, relatedness, or competence that we are trying to support so it was critical that we examine it for connections and stay curious.

Similarly, I have been running faculty development workshops and creating training materials for close to twenty years and have a lot of experience as to what seems to work and not work. I had to leave my ideas out and ask more questions when they had suggestions that I have tried before that may not have been successful and instead of saying, you know, I tried it, and it doesn't work that well, rather, tell me more—what about that approach resonates with you? After all, they were the target audience, who knows better than them? And if it didn't work well before, it could have been for a myriad of reasons beyond my control. Faculty pressures and supports might have been different, their feelings of connection and control, etc. I am often worried about taking too much time – faculty are busy, they have other priorities, etc. – and usually schedule things just a little short. For the fellowship we developed the team said no, this is important, design it with the time it needs. I am extremely grateful to have had other faculty to help design interventions for faculty. A related bias that I have is that faculty don't tend to train other faculty particularly well in teaching usually because it becomes a singular approach – this is what I do that works and doesn't work for me – as opposed to providing a variety of suggestions and learning more about individual teaching needs. But we absolutely NEED faculty to lead conversations and programs with other faculty otherwise this project won't be able to scale, and faculty listen to other faculty, so creating a system that grows beyond what I can personally support in my professional position is critical. The learning revealed that faculty do indeed learn a lot from other faculty and like learning from other faculty. Learning what faculty did in classes in different disciplines was a real eye opener for both the AR team and the Purposeful Teaching Fellows. We also found that bringing their new-found knowledge and expertise back to their departments was important to them.

## Summary

Using the Action Research and Organization Development process with a focus on systems learning, this research project was conducted with rigor and trustworthiness. Both qualitative and quantitate data was collected to triangulate the findings to identify learning and actionable knowledge. Chapter Three reviews the action research cycles and story in detail, and Chapter Four has a detailed analysis of the data, actionable knowledge, and conclusions.

# CHAPTER 3:

## THE AR STORY – Singing in Rounds Creating Complimentary Harmonics

*To intervene is to enter into an ongoing system of relationship, to come between or among persons, groups or objects for the purpose of helping them* (Argyris, 1970, p. 15).

I think about this quote from Argyris and my work with my AR team and system much like a choir director. The director is in a relationship with the choir to guide them through a song in a unified, harmonized voice, to strengthen individual voices, sections, and the full choir, empower them to do more as a group than they can as an individual, and set them up to perform touching hearts and minds through their beautiful song. Action research is about individuals working in harmony to impact hearts and minds. It is cyclical and I liken this work to singing in rounds. The second singer starts once the first phrase has been completed, but before the song is over creating complimentary harmonics.

I began my action research journey on a quest to see if it was possible to impact a higher-education system for an enhanced student experience. I did not know what this looked like, nor did I have the language to express this, but I had the curiosity, the wonder. I wondered if I could help enough people rethink their teaching practices to have a broad, positive impact on students' educational experiences. Through a series of events, inquiries, and reflections, this song starts with me, collects singers along the way, the choir grows singing more loudly with each round,

creating new harmonies. This is a song of change–personal change, group change, and systems change–which we will examine through the cycles of action research and change analysis.

## The Context

As introduced in Chapter 1, in the fall of 2022, Ely University, a mid-sized, private, R1 university in the southeast, launched a university campaign emphasizing three major goals, one of which is student flourishing. This is an additional focus on supporting students' engagement, feelings of purpose, value, and overall well-being (The Future Starts Here: Building Ely's Commitment to Serve Humanity, 2022). The commitment to student flourishing came from a desire to improve student retention rates, student satisfaction and well-being.

### The System & Situation: What Has Been Done at Ely University

Ely has been supporting student flourishing in several ways. In the extra-curricular space, they created a new Pathways Center that is designed to help students find internships and research opportunities more easily through increased funding and transparency. It supports career exploration through a focused sophomore retreat and career treks, and increased support to alumni after graduating (Pathways to Success, 2022). In the curriculum, Ely also has several new initiatives. They launched an AI.Humanity initiative, the first step of which developed an AI.Humanity minor for undergraduates and established an AI.Humanity center. They are also removing barriers to cross-enlist across colleges, so it is now easier for students in Ely's multiple undergraduate colleges to take classes in the business school which was traditionally only open to business majors (Ely's Student Flourishing Initiative Reimagines the Student Experience, 2022).

The Ely Purpose Project (EPP) was also developed to explore ways to bring more reflection and conversation around ethics to the student experience (Ely Student Flourishing

Initiative Reimagines the Student Experience, 2022). One approach was through the development of several first-year flourishing seminars like Fairytales and Flourishing, The Power of Storytelling, and Flourishing or "The Good Life" (First-year Flourishing Seminars, 2022), a Flourishing Fellows program for 15-20 students to explore flourishing in a community, and additional modules about flourishing in the required first-year Health 100 course (Ely's Student Flourishing Initiative Reimagines the Student Experience, 2022).

As evidenced, Ely's early focus on student flourishing was generally developing programs around peer and institutional belonging and not in the class experience itself. Learning *about* flourishing is not the same as creating an environment in which one can flourish. I saw this gap as an opportunity to further explore what it means for students to flourish in a classroom setting. The research completed in the exploration of how to support student flourishing in a course design model was guided by these questions:

1. To what extent do students' senses of autonomy, competence, and relatedness change when using the Purposeful Course Design model?
2. What is learned at the individual, group, and system levels that advanced the theory and practice in an action research project about including the elements of autonomy, competence, and relatedness of Self-Determination Theory in courses to support student flourishing?

## The Choir

### The Director's Background and Role

My role at Ely is the Director of Learning Design & Technology in the Center for Faculty Development and Excellence (CFDE), and I am responsible for supporting course development

initiatives through training, consultations, and workshops. My priority as a leader in instructional design has always been to help increase student-centered educational practices in the courses and curriculum. This could be by educating faculty about the use of supportive technologies, research-based cognitive strategies, standards-based assessments, or curricular alignment, to name a few. These practices are critical for learning, accessibility, and equity, and in my professional opinion, should be in every course. For busy faculty, I think it is important that their training and workshops provide concrete ways to immediately improve their instruction and assessment.

I have a lot of autonomy over the development of materials, workshops, seminars, etc. that focus on course design. I have the support of our Director, Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, and can connect with other upper-level administrators across the university. This allows me to gain insight into varying needs and promote new initiatives that I develop. Although I do not have direct power in the traditional sense of "mandating" programs, I have influential power that can increase visibility and influence.

**The Producers**

The major stakeholders in this study are first and foremost the faculty. By creating an action research team made up of faculty across the university, we were able to gather data on a variety of student needs, look for patterns, and ensure that our approach has broad application and appeal. Other stakeholders in Ely's flourishing initiative include administrators in student health, student affairs, the director of the Purpose Project with an explicit focus on student flourishing, and administrators involved with experiential learning. I met with representatives in all these areas, all of whom were interested in this research, and some of whom were on the AR team. Those who were not on the team are happy to serve in a supportive, consultative role.

Through the interest and involvement of those listed above, there is a direct line to the provost's office, the office that launched the student flourishing initiative.

**Meet the Chamber Choir: The Action Research Team**

I initially identified six people to be a part of the action research team, however, one of the faculty members was away on a sabbatical for the year and was unable to participate. Since her return, she has joined the committee that was formed because of this work. Descriptions of the five remaining team members using pseudonyms are below:

Dr. Kevin Green, Teaching Professor, Department of Chemistry in the Ely's College of Arts and Science. Dr. Green is a Black man on the teaching professional track at Ely. He teaches both large, multi-section intro courses and upper-level labs for undergraduate students. He is involved in a program that supports underrepresented minorities entering the STEM field. He has a vested interest in improving the student experience in STEM courses and has received the college teaching award.

Dr. Angela Rust is an Associate Professor in the Practice of the History of Christianity and the Senior Director of Digital Learning in Ely's professional school of Theology. Dr. Rust is a white woman with the dual role of teaching graduate students and overseeing the training and development of all online and hybrid courses within the school. Dr. Rust teaches small to mid-size classes and emphasizes activities to support accessibility and equity. She also trains faculty in the development of online instruction and has a strong background in course design.

Dr. Robert Smith is an Associate Professor of Organization & Management, and Executive Academic Director of the Business & Society Institute in Ely University's business school. He is a white man who teaches mid-size business classes to both undergraduates and graduates. He has a strong interest in student-centered practices that reduce anxiety and increase

motivation like labor-based grading and continuous feedback. He has received multiple undergraduate teaching awards and is looked to as a leader in teaching practices in the business school.

Dr. Diane Miller is an Assistant Professor on the research track in the School of Nursing at Ely University. She is a white woman who teaches small to mid-size undergraduate courses. She has participated in several workshops run by the Center for Faculty Development and Excellence and received a small teaching grant. She has a strong interest in active learning and flipped classrooms.

Dr. Tom Guile is the Associate Vice President for Health, Well-Being, Access, and Prevention at Ely University and oversees all student health services. He is a white man and has a strong interest in improving environments to better support students' well-being. While he oversees established, professional services like counseling and health promotion, he is extremely eager to look to other areas and practices that can support students as well. His background in psychology and student mental health needs will provide the team with an additional expertise and perspective that faculty alone do not always have.

As a group, we brought a variety of backgrounds and perspectives in disciplines, training, courses, and life. We had a breadth of reach into different schools within Ely University as well as administrative units.

## Problem Framing

### Problem Identification & Definition: Gaps in Student Flourishing at Ely

Ely's plan to offer increased access to courses on flourishing and extra-curricular activities to support flourishing is an improvement. However, a shortcoming with this plan is that most of it is opt-in and will not impact all students. This approach requires students to be aware

of the programming and intrinsically motivated enough to sign up, and even then, space and funding is limited. Therefore, I think it is critical to also look at how Ely can improve student flourishing in courses themselves.

Teaching about flourishing and designing for students to flourish are two very different things. Effective strategies and models in course design should be continually evolving based on emerging scientific and psychological research, as well as the ongoing needs of students. Current practices include techniques that have emerged recently from the fields of cognitive science and behavioral psychology which help create stronger knowledge and skills (Dunlosky et al., 2013; McDaniel & Donnelly, 1996; Freeman et al., 2014), along with the need for course alignment, increased transparency, equitable access to materials, and motivation (Ambrose et al., 2010). An added layer of strategies that supports psychological growth—flourishing—along with cognitive growth needs to be included.

Flourishing, specifically, comes out of psychological growth, engagement, and wellness. Self-determination theory contends that people are inherently curious, physically active, and deeply social beings (Ryan & Deci, 2017). For growth, people need an environment that supports the basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, but if, by contrast, the environment is "need-thwarting" such as being "overly controlling, rejecting, critical, and negative or that otherwise frustrate autonomy, relatedness and competence needs, individuals are more likely to become self-focused, defensive, amotivated, aggressive and antisocial" (p. 9). It goes on to state that SDT is largely experience-dependent, where positive outcomes rely on satisfactory environments— "more self-determined functioning is associated with greater creativity, superior learning, better performance, enhanced well-being and higher quality relationships" (p. 17). Classrooms are designed experiences and environments, and this is where paying close attention

to what creates a thriving versus a thwarting environment can be critical not only to student learning, but to student flourishing as well.

## Our Song

### A Song Guide: Overview of AR Cycles

As noted in Chapter 2, I used the action research approach in this study and tracked the iterative work through several action research macro- and micro-cycles of constructing, planning, acting, and evaluating action (Coghlan, 2019). Figure 6 and Table 5 help illustrate the action research cycles. Figure 6 illustrates the cycles of our team's intervention plan within the theoretical framework. The intervention plan consists of eight (8) micro-cycles within three (3) macro-cycles. Because there are three steps to each macro-cycle, the next one begins once the micro-cycle of the previous one was completed and analyzed, similar to singing in rounds. The second singer starts once the first phrase has been completed, but before the song is over. Table 5 outlines the milestones in terms of time and semesters, referencing where each micro- and macro-cycle is.

**Figure 6**

*Action Research Cycles (adapted from Coghlan 2019, p. 11)*

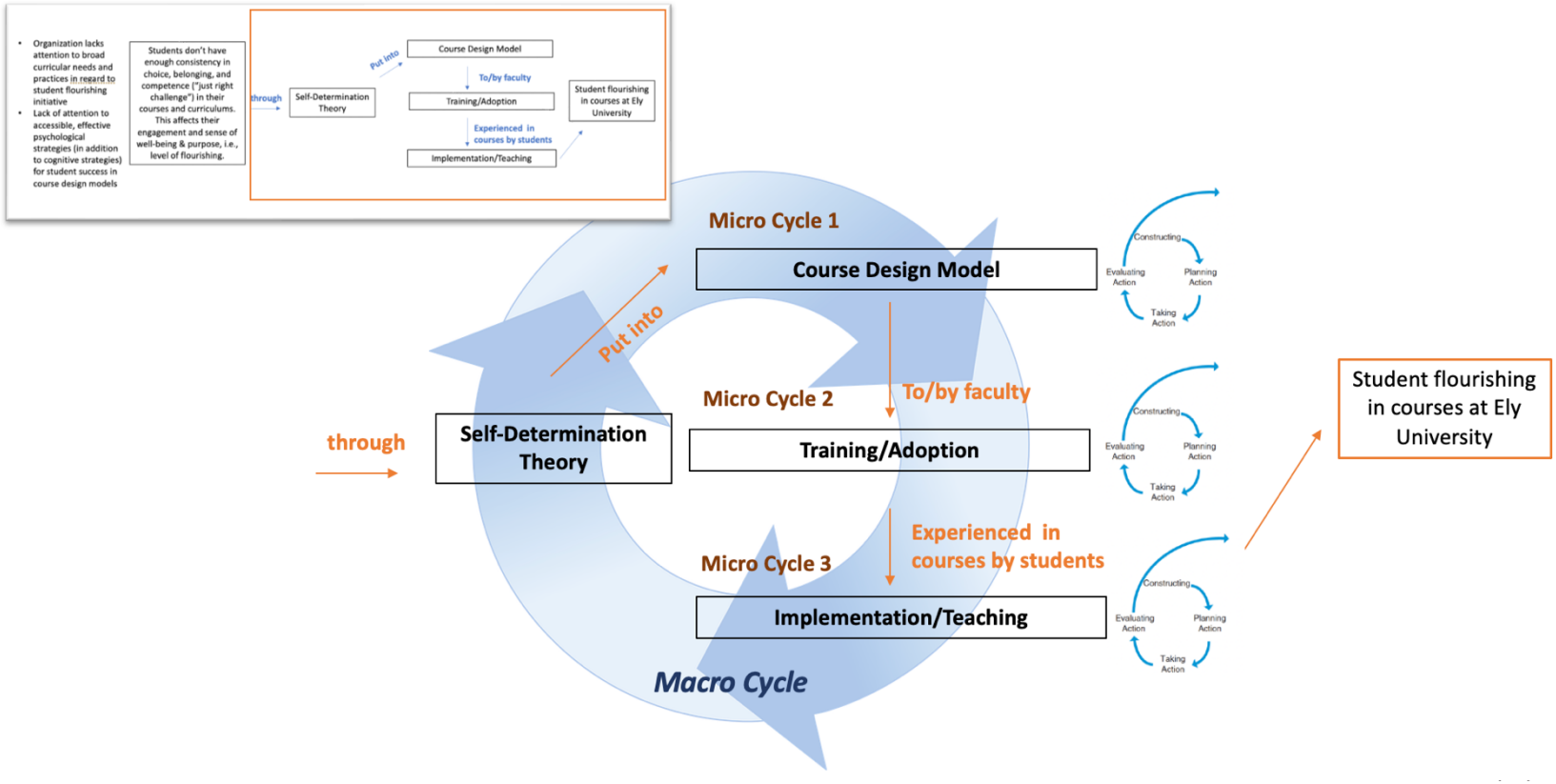


**Table 5**

*Milestones*

| Milestone | Semester | Actions |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | FA23 – SP24 | • Collection of preliminary data on the course design tools and strategies (1.1 – FA23)<br>• Implementation (1.2 – SP24)<br>• Faculty and student surveys (1.3 – SP24) |
| **2** | WI24 | • Recruit faculty to use the course design tool and redesign their fall ’24 courses (2.1) |
| **3** | SP24/SU24 | • Faculty have completed the course redesign process (2.2) |
| **4** | end of FA24 | • Faculty have completed teaching their redesigned course (2.3) |
| **5** | SP25 | • Continue to expand course redesign offerings; examine how this begins to impact the system level (3.1; 3.2) |

**Action Research Pre-Step: Our Tuning Note - Context & Purpose**

On August 7, 2023, my action research team met for the first time. This meeting was critical in developing our team dynamic and establishing the context and purpose of this research as a group, not as me as an individual researcher (Coghlan, 2019; Levi & Askay, 2021). In the constructing phase, we needed to establish an accurate diagnosis of the opportunity we were exploring (Stouten et al., 2018; Anderson, 2020) and build group trust. I used action inquiry to facilitate this dialogue. This allowed everyone to listen to the developing situation, decipher which tasks appeared to have priority, and invite revisioning for the tasks. As we moved into planning action, we could then determine what action was most timely (Torbert, 2004). Gratifyingly, this approach helped highlight the hidden work we needed to do even in the first session.

After we spent time getting to know each other through a facilitated ice breaker, learning about action research, and sharing my vision of student flourishing through self-determination theory, the talk quickly turned to what could prevent the vision around student flourishing from happening—and it was about faculty. The team felt that faculty lacked training and support around teaching from the institution, had limited time to devote to teaching preparation, and pressure to publish and apply for grants over teaching. During this time, Tom said:

> *I wonder if, because you're talking about this from impacting students…but you have also been talking about faculty flourishing…what are the barriers for whatever it is for faculty to own this sense of their own kind of self-efficacy around being able to apply this. And it just seems like this applies to faculty as well. What is getting them to do it and own it as opposed to it being given to them. Like, go do these things. How do I bring this into my work and how do I then relate this to students in a way that feels right for me?*

Very quickly, the team agreed that student flourishing must start with faculty flourishing but pondered what does that look like? By the next meeting two weeks later, we outlined our research inquiry into the *technical problem* of developing and testing a course design model based on self-determination theory that will improve student flourishing, and the *adaptive problem* of implementing the model at scale (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). From a change analysis perspective, this spans *first-order change* - change implemented within an existing structure or way of thinking—*second-order change* – change that requires challenging some of the core assumptions within a given situation – and *third-order change* – concrete problems that are a direct result of larger organizational approaches or attitudes (Coghlan, 2019). I could see that even in that first meeting when we were still constructing the problem that a real impact on student flourishing within courses would require: 1) a change in how education happens within a formal learning high-education setting; 2) challenging the process of how to prepare faculty to teach and some of their autonomy around what and how to teach; and 3) how systems of higher-education value and reward strong teaching practices. Although the teleology change perspective is about setting goals and working towards them and the importance of the person's action to that end, it also recognizes that there are limits within an organization's environment and the reality of those limits (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Toward the end of the first meeting, Tom said, "*So this to me feels really important, and you've already been naming this; faculty first might really be the thing we're focusing on here."*

**Constructing – The Song Begins, AR Team Round 1**

*Force Field Analysis*

Throughout the Fall 2023 semester, the AR team built additional preliminary data about this problem. One of the first exercises we did as a team was a force field analysis considering

forces for and against change. A force field analysis can be useful in identifying forces restraining change and considering ways to reduce them, instead of only generating ideas to take action (Coghlan, 2019). The statement that we used was “The change we are working towards is to increase the number of courses that incorporate strategies to support everyone’s essential need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness to better support student well-being and flourishing at Ely University.” Three major themes for driving forces for change emerged: 1) student needs; 2) faculty attitudes; 3) resources; and three major themes for barriers emerged: 1) competing pressures; 2) curricular challenges; 3) lack of financial and technical support. Three identified needs were also identified in this process: 1) creation of a director for academic support position (a conductor for student needs, though one person cannot do all of this); 2) buy-in from faculty to spend the time outside of research to improve pedagogy; 3) support from the university level for both faculty and students, this includes resources, but also carved out time to improve education. Table 6 below shows the comments associated with each identified theme.

**Table 6**

*Force Field Analysis*

| Driving Forces for Change | Forces Against Change (barriers) |
|---|---|
| **Student Needs** | **Competing Pressures** |
| • Student advocacy for themselves and changes in the school<br>• Student autonomy in their own learning process<br>• Students much more aware of their own stress and well-being than before<br>• More technical tools available to create more flexible classrooms<br>• Students are increasingly feeling isolated, stressed, full of anxiety – how can we help reduce this?<br>• Increasingly complex environment yet teaching and learning look the same as 50 years ago- not preparing students for reality: globalization, communication, interdependence etc. | • TPAC does not incentivize teaching/student engagement as a category<br>• Faculty not promoted/evaluated based on teaching - Little incentive<br>• Faculty are in different stages in their career – different demands<br>• Positionality – hard to communicate the need for change and strategies – most support is opt-in<br>• Values- teaching and learning is less valued in terms of promotion, pay within the departments and schools |
| **Faculty Attitudes** | **Curricular Challenges** |
| • New crop of faculty who are genuinely invested in student wellbeing (in course design as well as in one-on-one engagement)<br>• Creation of a new degree program is bringing in different kinds of students who invite creativity in course delivery and design<br>• Faculty see the value in application of knowledge and skill as 1) our job as a professional school 2) essential in the age of AI and 3) are (mostly) open to shifting their assessments to reflect this need.<br>• Faculty investment, buy-in from faculty to spend time outside of research to improve pedagogy | • Students are arriving with at least one job, often several, often fulltime—they expect to fit Candler into their existing work/life loads and that is not fully sustainable (even when we designed a "flexible" degree).<br>• Huge number of non-residential students makes existing support models ineffective—how to scale and shift mode?<br>• Flexible degree introduces fewer sequenced courses, and faculty will need to integrate "basic" skill building into ALL classes not just "intro" ones.<br>• Corporatization of higher education puts more focus on costs and efficiency |

- Lots of untapped potential to get faculty more engaged

**Resources**

- Ely has deep bench in student health services
- Reduced stress etc. supports better learning outcomes - skills and knowledge
- Rapid change in technology increases access to information and communication tools – how can we use this to our advantage?
- Empirical research around effective teaching practices continues to build

- Hard for any single class or university to address problems like polarization or climate change
- Growing focus on technical skills and job placement is sometimes at odds with well-being and flourishing

**Lack of financial and technical support**

- School doesn't have as large a pool of financial resources
- Technical upgrades to our building are very complicated
- Higher education faces a legitimacy crisis due to increasing costs and politicization of mission
- Under-supported – not enough investment in the personnel infrastructure to better support implementation
    - Faculty are being asked to do more without increased support leading to withdraw and/or burnout
- Classroom structure – many classrooms are still lecture style, even ones that aren’t are often overcrowded with furniture!

This exercise and discussion reinforced our early idea that for students to flourish, faculty need to flourish, and improving a course design for student flourishing is just as much about faculty as it is about students. We continued to see this theme emerge through the critical incident interviews later in the semester. It was interesting to see this reveal itself as the real work that this group will take on. Yes, the end goal is student flourishing, and yes, new tools are needed to support that better, but the real sticky issue, the adaptive issue, is figuring out how to get these tools to faculty in a way that is empowering and sustainable for them. Otherwise, the tools don't matter. This was felt at both the individual level and the group level and is at the heart of the systems level learning. The other need that frequently surfaced in the early meetings was the necessity to build a stronger community around teaching, and that too, is beyond developing better, accessible design strategies. Building community requires time and intention with a strong foundation to survive personnel and administrative change. It needs to be "evergreen" as Tom liked to say.

*Critical Incident Interviews*

Through critical incident interviews, we gathered data from faculty based on their flourishing experiences with students and as students. This data supported assertions that to flourish both faculty and students need to have their needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness met. This is illustrated in Table 7 Theoretical Assertions, below, and supported by specific examples and quotes from the interviews below the table.

**Table 7**

*Theoretical Assertions*

| Participant | Critical Incident Title | Assertion | Theme |
|---|---|---|---|
| Angela | A Life-Giving Class | If students have a supportive learning environment (e.g. time to think, discuss, reflect, experiment, are given supportive feedback, etc.) they are able to feel a sense of accomplishment even when the course material is challenging and have struggled at times. | Autonomy-supportive |
| Angela | Flourishing is in the Struggle! | | Competence-supportive; Student flourishing |
| Robert | Rising to the Challenge with Support | | |
| Kevin | Transcending the Classroom | | |
| Kevin | Growth Happens Outside Your Comfort Zone | | |
| Robert | A Multi-faceted Approach | When faculty see students in multiple contexts/classes they form stronger relationships that increase feelings of relatedness. | Relatedness-supportive |
| Angela | A Life-Giving Class | When classes are smaller it is easier to form faculty-student and student-student relationships. | Relatedness-supportive |
| Angela | Flourishing is in the Struggle! | | |
| Robert | A Multi-faceted Approach | | |
| Robert | Rising to the Challenge with Support | | |
| Kevin | It's Out of My Control | | |
| Angela | A Life-Giving Class | When classes are smaller it is easier to provide students with flexibility and choice. | Autonomy-supportive; Competence-supportive |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Angela | Too Big and Too Flexible! | | |
| Robert | A Multi-faceted Approach | | |
| Angela | A Life-Giving Class | Courses are more fun for faculty and students when everyone is engaged in with the material. | Student flourishing; Faculty flourishing |
| Angela | Flourishing is in the Struggle! | | |
| Robert | A Multi-faceted Approach | | |
| Robert | Rising to the Challenge with Support | | |
| Diane | Mythbusters | | |
| Diane | An Online Disconnect | | |
| Kevin | Transcending the Classroom | | |
| Kevin | It's Out of My Control | | |
| Angela | A Life-Giving Class | When students are given a choice in topics, they choose something that is meaningful to them. | Autonomy-supportive; Competence-supportive |
| Diane | Mythbusters | | |
| Angela | A Life-Giving Class | When faculty have other people to talk to about teaching, they feel supported, creative, and competent. | Autonomy-supportive; Competence-supportive; Relatedness-supportive; Faculty flourishing |
| Robert | A Multi-faceted Approach | | |
| Diane | Mythbusters | | |
| Angela | A Life-Giving Class | When faculty flourish, students flourish | Student flourishing; Faculty flourishing |
| Robert | A Multi-faceted Approach | | |
| Diane | Mythbusters | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Robert | Large and Disconnected | When faculty feel disconnected, students feel disconnected. | Autonomy-frustrating; Relatedness-frustrating |
| Diane | An Online Disconnect | | |
| Diane | We Learned It On Our Own | | |
| Kevin | It's Out of My Control | | |
| Angela | Too Big and Too Flexible! | Courses designed for small classes don't transfer well to large courses. | Competence-frustrating |
| Robert | Large and Disconnected | | |
| Diane | We Learned It On Our Own | When faculty don't (or can't) seem to care about the purpose of the course, students feel frustrated and confused. | Autonomy-frustrating; Competence-frustrating |
| Angela | Too Big and Too Flexible! | When relatedness is prevented, (whether it is in the faculty's control or not) student engagement suffers. | Relatedness-frustrating |
| Robert | Large and Disconnected | | |
| Diane | An Online Disconnect | | |
| Kevin | It's Out of My Control | | |

*Analysis of Themes*

As expected, based on empirical research, these interviews illustrate that student flourishing is supported by providing students with a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in a course. When students feel seen and validated and are given the information they need to succeed, even a challenging or required course can result in a sense of flourishing. When students can choose topics and deliverables that are meaningful to them, they engage with the material and have a sense of joy. Students shut down and disengage when one or more elements of autonomy, competence, or relatedness are frustrated. They may push through the course on their own out of necessity, but without a sense of excitement or flourishing, on the contrary, often with a sense of annoyance, discouragement, or disengagement.

Not unexpected but certainly less researched is an undeniable link between faculty flourishing and student flourishing. Faculty are better able to provide students with the learning environment they need when they themselves have a sense of flourishing both in their teaching and full vocation as a faculty member. When they feel seen, heard, and supported in all their responsibilities, their excitement for their discipline comes through in their teaching and is infectious to their students. Removing faculty control and not supporting competence and relatedness can negatively impact teaching and student learning. This can be seen in over-enrollment, lack of choice in the teaching environment, and lack of connection with colleagues around teaching.

**Planning Action Round 1: The Tool**

*The Framework*

Around the same time that we were collecting data on faculty and student flourishing needs, we also explored what an updated course design model to support student flourishing based on self-determination theory might look like. Because of my expertise in instructional design, I outlined course development frameworks based on best practices in curricular alignment and improving student learning outcomes. I then layered strategies from empirical research on self-determination theory in education settings that have been shown to promote a sense of flourishing as outlined previously. The first version of this tool was a three-column table with specific criteria in each row and column. We looked at the tool as a team to gather input. Initial reactions were that faculty would need more support around the language being used:

> **Kevin:** *I wasn't here last time, so just seeing autonomy [in connection to a class] my initial reaction was, well, what does that mean? You mentioned sort of redefining or clarifying it. I think that would probably be a good idea since I had that reaction, I'm sure many other people would as well.*

> **Diane***: I think [we] could probably clarify relatedness a little bit more too. I'm assuming that is relatedness to the world and to what's going on and current events or even to themselves.*

Based on this team discussion, I added a page with explanatory language and sent the updated file out to the team for testing.

*Evaluating the Framework*

While the updated tool was based on strategies from empirical research, we still needed to evaluate its impact on students at Ely University. I located a tool that had been tested for validity and reliability in multiple education settings, *Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS)* for school/students and school/teachers (Van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2020), mentioned in Chapter Two. As a group, we reviewed the tool and agreed that it was a good way to test how student attitudes regarding feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness within a course. After using the course review tool to make minor changes to their spring courses, the group agreed to test the survey in the classes. Tom also suggested that I meet with the Office of Institutional Research and share the tool I found with them since they are also looking at ways to measure student flourishing, though not through the specific lens of self-determination theory. Tom set up a meeting with the group and that was when we connected with the Director of the Ely Purpose Project, Scott, who turned out to be a major partner in this work. I had a follow-up meeting with Scott after which I reflected in my journal, "*It's funny because I thought the meeting was just to see what they [the office of institutional research and Purpose Project] were doing and make sure I was being consistent with them, but then when I explained the project they were super interested and we barely talked about what they were doing!"* This highlights how crucial an open, inclusive, iterative approach to this work is—you never know who or where a critical partnership might appear. A choir director should always have an ear out for new members, and in this case, we added a bass bringing some grounding to our song. One voice can create a whole new sound.

**Taking Action & Evaluating Action in Technical Change: The Tool**

In the next team meeting, we asked Kevin to walk us through his thought process using the tool to evaluate his upcoming spring course to observe how a faculty member might think about it. Overall, he did not have much trouble and said that he found it helpful in identifying areas to improve, for example, being more explicit about how a course fits into a larger curriculum. Diane said it helped her think about how to include more choice in a course where choice seemed limited. The group collectively thought that the tool promoted productive reflection and we could continue to improve the format to be more user-friendly and self-guided. We continued to develop the course review tool over the next several months resulting in a 22 - page printed handbook with checkboxes, explanations and QR codes to online resources, and links in the online pdf version, Appendix A. In the focus groups with the fellows at the end of the fellowship one person commented:

> *The little booklet was really important for me because it was really during the sessions I felt like I had a lot of ideas and I would brainstorm, but when I had to sit down and plan it out and think of alignment and think about competency versus goals especially…it was much easier to go through it later with that kind of outline structure…So, for me, that was really helpful to have that kind of support when I was going through and really doing it.*

Over the next few months as we continued to plan and take action on the adaptive challenge of faculty training and implementation, discussed below, we landed on a name for this framework – *Purposeful Course Design: Course Alignment + Design for Learning + Design for Flourishing.*

The other piece to test with the tool was the impact that the updated course design had on students. To do this, after the faculty on the AR team did a course review to identify whether or

not they were supporting student flourishing and ways to improve, they agreed to test the *Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS)* for school/students (Van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2020) and the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2009), mentioned in Chapter 2. At the start of their spring semester, January 2024 and again at the end, they gave the students a pre- and post-survey to see the student attitudes about flourishing in their classes at Ely in general and this specific class. The pre-survey asked students to think about their experiences in classes in general at Ely University and the post-survey asked students to reflect on their experience in this specific course. Preliminary data was promising and showed a significant increase in feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the courses that made an effort to support these basic psychological needs as compared to students' typical experiences in the courses, as seen in Table 8.

**Table 8**

*Pre-data: Pre/post Student Survey Results BPNSNF*

| | n =129 Pre | n =101 Post | Change | Percent | P-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Autonomy | 3.92 | 5.09 | 1.17 | 29.8 | 0.02 |
| Competence | 4.17 | 5.01 | 0.87 | 21.1 | 0.00001 |
| Relatedness | 4.19 | 5.07 | 0.83 | 19.8 | 0.03 |

The course design framework, handbook, and survey continued to have minor changes in subsequent cycles, but they seemed to work as they were envisioned to. These technical changes—a modified course development tool and new teaching strategies—fall within the first-order change or "single-loop" learning that is, modification of something familiar – a course development process (Coghlan, 2019). This was critical work because we wanted to know that this technical fix functioned correctly, but now we will explore the adaptive work that needed to happen for systemic change to occur.

**Planning Action Verse 2: For Students to Flourish, Faculty Need to Flourish**

Throughout the meetings during fall 2023 the AR team spent a lot of time discussing what faculty need to feel more supported in their teaching – what they need to flourish—bringing us back to the notion that for students to flourish, faculty need to flourish. Many ideas were shared including the need for more time to do the work, more support from instructional designers, and increased impact on tenure and promotion packets.

The October meeting with Ely's Office of Institutional Research where I met Scott, Director of the Purpose Project, led to an offer to support this work financially, something that I could not offer, so that was exciting news. I shared this with the AR team, and we invited him to our next AR meeting in November. We discussed what faculty need to be able to do the work to

better support student flourishing. Ideas included improved community around teaching practices, incentives like course reductions, stipends, equipment, prestigious titles, fellowships, onboarding, and tying teaching excellence to promotion. Angela said, "*There's a lot of 'let me bring in this expert to talk at you,' but part of it is sharing the energy and creativity of your colleagues and learning from them*".

Robert added:

> *And I would second that because I think about my colleagues who are skeptical about teaching, they're going to hear something different when they hear it from another faculty member discussing their teaching than when they hear it from somebody outside the department. And so, when they hear from faculty who are thinking about issues related to flourishing or student wellbeing and creative teaching who are also dealing with all the same pressures of research and administration, and I think just helps it. They just hear it differently. And so, we don't have anything like that in [our school] where it is specifically focused on faculty to faculty--conversations around teaching and flourishing. Instead, we have faculty lunches where people just complain about stuff. But that's not really productive.*

Scott summarizes this agreeing, "*The structure needs to support good teaching and the people need to care about good teaching. Or another way to say it is people need to be motivated to teach as well as incentivized to teach*." To which Dianne responds "*Those are probably the key words there. Motivation and incentive.*" As we continued to talk, honing in on how to better motivate and incentivize good teaching became critical. Self-Determination Theory is a theory of motivation at its core, so designing a faculty program that supports autonomy, competence, and relatedness was an agreed first step. The team thought that a few ways to incentivize faculty to

participate were to 1) provide a stipend; 2) give it a title that faculty could put on their CV – a fellowship was agreed on; 3) create in-person sessions that were long enough for faculty to do some work (supporting competence) and talk with other faculty (supporting relatedness).

**Taking Action: Growing the Choir with The Fellowship**

*Overview*

We named the fellowship *The Purposeful Teaching Fellowship* based on the newly developed Purposeful Course Design tool and handbook. Sessions would also include pedagogical strategies from SDT research. The application call went out over my center's listserv and website in mid-January and was open for about three weeks. It read:

> The Purposeful Teaching Fellowship focuses on developing courses that support student learning and student flourishing. It will help faculty consider what it means for students to flourish in a course and provide concrete strategies to promote this.
>
> *Goals:*
>
> The goals of the Purposeful Teaching Fellowship are:
>
> - To bring purposeful course design and pedagogy into Ely classrooms to promote student learning and flourishing.
> - To develop a support structure around teaching to provide faculty with time, competence, and conversation to develop classes where they can also flourish.
> - To provide recognition to faculty commitment to excellent teaching.

We had enough funding to support 10 fellows, and we received 19 applications. The first criteria in determining acceptance that we looked at was the courses themselves- were any core courses (e.g., high-impact or high-enrollment)? This time around they were mostly smaller

electives. After that, acceptance was based on creating a diverse cohort regarding discipline, school, rank, experience, gender, and ethnicity. One member on the AR team, Diane, applied as well. Other members of the AR team were invited to different sessions to share their ideas and perspectives.

*Fellowship Structure*

The AR team provided much guidance in the fellowship's structure. A large gap that the faculty on the team experienced in their teaching was being able to talk to other faculty about teaching and having enough time to work on new course development. Based on those needs, the team decided that there should be multiple sessions that were long enough to provide work time, and they should all be in person to build a community of practice around teaching. This collaboration had a huge impact on the design of the fellowship to which I reflected:

> *We spent a lot of time talking about what it is faculty need and want to be able to spend time on improving their courses. I think connection is a big one, so the pilot in the spring should really include time to build relationships (relatedness!). Robert pointed out that competency could be built quickly or slowly, so this reminded me that yes, indeed, this model has to include everything! I was initially focused on making a tool that is accessible even without other people, but maybe that is a misaligned focus...It's definitely not something I would have been able to design without the extended conversation and input and it makes me wonder why all of our programming isn't built with more collaboration...I think at the individual level I'm continuing to improve how to go even further in collaborations and not jump right into the design. I did this before, but definitely not to the extent that this program is leading us through and it's so invaluable. For example, I'm not a fan of calling things "fellowships"...BUT I learned that this is a*

*way for faculty to communicate their time and effort in teaching in a concrete way to their chairs and deans, which is necessary. Rather than trying to come up with a whole new system, this is a system I can work in for now and spend my collateral on systems that really do require a major overhaul.*

It was decided that the fellows would meet six times over an 8-week period for two or three hours each time. The content was organized in the learning management system at Ely with session goals, content, and post-session work. The topics were:

1. Fellowship Overview and Purposeful Course Goals
2. Making Connections
3. Where the Learning Happens
4. Weekly/Module Goals
5. Content Curation
6. Grading & Syllabus

*The Fellowship*

The fellowship sessions were lively and engaging. The faculty enjoyed working with and learning from a variety of disciplines. The fellows represented a variety of demographics and disciplines as seen in Table 9.

**Table 9**

*Purposeful Teaching Fellows, 2024*

| Gender | Race | Level | Discipline | College |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| M | White | Associate Teaching Professor | Biology/Environmental Science | 2-year college of Arts & Sciences |
| F | Asian | Associate Teaching Professor | Linguistics | Arts & Sciences |
| F | White | Assistant Professor | Academic Advancement | Nursing |
| F | Black | Assistant Clinical Professor of Nursing | Nursing | Nursing |
| F | White | Professor | Religious Education | Theology |
| M | White | Assistant Teaching Professor | Film and Media Studies, Art Program | Arts & Sciences |
| F | Hispanic | Associate Teaching Professor | Spanish and Portuguese | Arts & Sciences |
| F | White | Assistant Professor, Dir of Didactic Ed | Physician Assistant program | School of Medicine |
| M | Asian | Associate Professor | Psychology | Arts& Sciences |
| F | White | Assistant teaching professor | Biology and QTM | Arts & Sciences |

About the six instructional sessions, one fellow reflected,

> *It was eye-opening to hear other faculty, from many different disciplines, talk about their challenges and their successes. It made me think of perspectives not often discussed in my own field. I also really liked that the workshop was in-person and we committed to spending two or three hours together each week. We were able to make personal connections with other faculty, which may even lead to collaborations in the future.*

Similarly, another said:

> *Was really grateful to meet colleagues from across the university. The commitment that each of us have to not only our students' flourishing, but also our own, was an energizing and heart-healing discovery. It's been a hard few years for all the reasons. Thank you for introducing me to these wonderful people who still want to connect to the real heart of teaching and learning.*

To other faculty considering the fellowship one said:

> *I think it is worth your time if you truly want to reduce the stress of your students and help them thrive in the current environment. This seems to be the direction higher education is moving in and it definitely strays from traditional lecture-based pedagogy that we are used to.*

Another said:

> *It's a wonderful opportunity to re-imagine your course from the inside out. You'll meet other terrific colleagues who are sometimes wrestling with the same questions as you, sometimes have already tried something that will help you. And don't worry that this fellowship will ask you to "sacrifice rigor." Instead, it will help you accompany students on a deeper path of learning.*

Chapter 4 will examine individual, group and systems-learning learning that came from the fellowship.

Once the in-person sessions were over, faculty were required to complete the rest of their course redesign independently. I met with the fellows to review course sites and syllabi if requested, and we met in two groups in the summer to share the completed changes before teaching in the fall semester. One course ran over the summer, so I met with that fellow ahead of time to review her plans. At the start of the semester, the faculty gave the students the survey that the group designed to collect student perceptions about flourishing and how they feel about flourishing in classes at Ely. We met once midway through the semester to see how things were going and if anyone ran into any issues. The majority were happy with the changes they made and could see a positive change in student engagement. One fellow who felt like she didn't make many changes discussed small things like providing more choice and an organized course site that still impacted the students. These check-in meetings provided the ongoing community of support that is sometimes lost once a busy semester begins. At the end of the semester, the student survey was given again to collect the post student data. This data will be examined in Chapter 4. We concluded the fellowship with a congratulatory reception for those who had just completed it and a welcome reception for the second cohort of fellows. I made a Certificate of Completion, personally calligraphed their names, and had our director and myself sign them and put them in a frame to present at the reception. I was pleasantly surprised with how much they liked this! The second cohort has 18 faculty members and began their first session on February 7th, 2025. We secured funding from both my center and ongoing support from the Purpose Project almost tripling the budget for the 2024/25 academic year.

**Evaluating Action: How Did That Sound?**

At the conclusion of the fellowship, I held three focus groups to gather information from the faculty about their experiences over the past year. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. The fellows enjoyed working and learning together. Many of them mentioned how self-determination theory provided them with a grounded approach to student flourishing. One said,

> *I think for me the self-determination theory really stands out and those three aspects and that sense of autonomy to give student choice and ownership of their project. And also the competence - I use more quizzes this semester because of that factor and also to relatedness. I really like it to the sense of community building. And I think I learned a lot from the discussion with other fellows and with you.*

Another shared,

> *Self-Determination theory was a real revelation. I think the two main things I got from being introduced to that theory and then having all this time to think about what it actually looks like in person or in real life is first, the relatedness piece. That's kind of instinctively how I've taught, but it was really nice to have research that backs up that that's a good way to teach and so I was able to be more explicit about it with the students…But really the autonomy piece was important for me. So I did points-based grading for that reason. I gave students a lot of choice. We would often have small group discussions, and they would get to choose which question they wanted to talk about. So those kinds of things really were supported by learning more about autonomy in the classroom. Probably what I can work on more is competence if that makes sense. I mean, that sounds crazy. Like I know most people are like, oh, I got competence. But in a field*

> *like mine, practical theology, measuring competence is harder. It's not as straightforward. So that's what I need to work on next.*

And another,

> *I think for me kind of wrapping my brain around what autonomy really means for students and how I can implement different strategies within my course to increase that. I went to school originally 20 plus years ago, and, you know, there was no autonomy. You went to class and you listened to lectures, did all the things, you didn't really converse much with the professors. And now it's totally different ball game. And I guess not only me giving them the choice, but them wanting the choice and expecting the choice. So I think that was the biggest thing for me.*

When asked about what other supports or changes to the fellowship could be made for the next year a few people were interested in continuing the conversation in more discipline-specific spaces. While they all agreed it was enlightening to hear about different student needs and strategies, when it comes to implementation different schools ultimately have varying expectations, class sizes, student expectations, etc., so speaking with faculty who had similar constraints would have been helpful. Including more peer-to-peer feedback was another suggestion. With the increase in size the following year I had been playing with this idea myself, so it was reassuring to hear a fellow suggest it along with thoughts about discipline-specific feedback.

> *I don't know whether it's feasible. I understand everyone's busy. I think maybe in addition to the feedback you provided over the syllabus, maybe a possibility might be for fellows who teach similar subjects or topics might pair up and then provide feedback to each other. Then a small group or a peer group meet over the semester to discuss their*

*experience. But I understand the time constraint of course. But I think that might be helpful to provide feedback and receive feedback to each other in addition from you and your colleague.*

With this feedback in mind, one change that has already happened in the third macro cycle of course design was to assign peer-partners in the fellowship. Check-ins in the fall are also planned, and perhaps grouping these around discipline is an option. Although to the several comments about everyone being busy, a constraint might be that the groups are based on availability.

Overall, this feedback shows that the fellowship met the goal of providing faculty with a greater sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their course development and teaching practices thus supporting faculty flourishing. The fellows had time and financial support to work on their course development, increased their knowledge around effective student-centered teaching practices, felt confident implementing new strategies, and enjoyed working with and learning from their colleagues. This verifies that this is an effective professional development model for faculty at Ely University.

## On to the Next Concert

If you are not dizzy yet from these endless rounds of singing, the conclusion of the fellowship brings us to the end of macro cycle 2 (six micro cycles). We are pushing forward into the third macro cycle of building sustainability for not just the fellowship, but the work to support student and faculty flourishing in general. As the fellowship was being developed and implemented, other groups around campus were interested in the Purposeful Course Design approach and I worked with them, and continue to work with them, to create common language and approaches in course design to support student flourishing. I have met with faculty in the

school of medicine's first year curriculum, reviewed a proposal for the development of fifteen first year flourishing seminars that includes training for the faculty based on the Purposeful Course Design model, was invited to speak with the instructional librarians, and continue to expand partnerships with campus life, specifically around student well-being.

As the fellows were teaching their fall courses, the AR team invited a few new people interested in this work to begin joining our meetings. The group in campus life that focuses on student well-being is interested and invested in the holistic approach to student experiences which includes their time in the classroom, time campus life administrators do not traditionally invest in. The original AR team has changed a little as we move into this next phase with one member concluding his work at the end of December 2024, and two new members joining, one of whom is the new Executive Director for the Center for Student Wellbeing.

This will be explored more in systems level-learning in Chapter 4, but the exciting take-away is that the choir is growing! We are moving beyond a small chamber choir to large ensemble chorus. Perhaps an orchestra is next!

## Conclusion

To draw this concert to a close, it is evident that the rounds of action research and single, double, and triple-loop learning are what contribute to a rich sound growing stronger with each verse. By first addressing and verifying that our technical first-order change of updating a course design model to support student flourishing was valid, we were then able to turn our attention to the adaptive problem of second and third order change that will be necessary to have system-wide impact. What is needed to address the concrete complications that are a result of organizational approaches and attitudes is substantiated in group and systems learning in Chapter 4.

Through this choir director's pursuit of constant improvement and the dedication of the choir members, I think we have written a new song for our next concert. The original title of this study was *Using Self-Determination Theory in Course Design to Support Student Flourishing*, but it is now titled *Student Flourishing through Faculty Flourishing: Self-Determination for All.* And it goes like this: faculty flourishing is student flourishing, student flourishing is faculty flourishing, and round and round it goes. Kind of has a nice ring to it.

# CHAPTER 4:

# INSIGHTS AND ACTIONABLE KNOWLEDGE

Chapter 4 examines the data collected, answers the research questions, and in doing so considers the actionable knowledge gained. The research questions are:

1. To what extent do students' senses of autonomy, competence, and relatedness change when using Self-Determination Theory in course design to support student flourishing?
2. What is learned at the individual, group, and system levels that advanced the theory and practice in an action research project about including the elements of autonomy, competence, and relatedness of Self-Determination Theory in courses to support student flourishing?

Based on the data collected, two major insights that were found about course design for student flourishing are: 1) Intentionally designing a course to support student flourishing through the lens of self-determination theory by better supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness has statistically significant impact; 2) To be able to broadly implement course design for student flourishing, faculty flourishing needs to be supported. Faculty make up a large part of the infrastructure in a higher education institution and so faculty flourishing is a systems-level issue. Thus, the road to better supporting students in the classroom begins with the system and culture of the institution. Data collected from individual, group, and systems learning identified

what faculty need from an organization to better support their sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their teaching responsibilities, thus enabling them to better support their students.

## Research Question 1 Findings: Impact of Course Design Model

This section will examine the findings for research question one: *To what extent do students' senses of autonomy, competence, and relatedness change when using Self-Determination Theory in course design to support student flourishing?* Quantitative findings from student surveys are triangulated with qualitative data from student surveys, AR team interviews, and Purposeful Teaching Fellows focus group to show the positive impact of Purposeful Course Design on the student classroom experience.

### Purposeful Course Design Supports Student Flourishing through SDT

To determine the impact of the Purposeful Course Design model on student perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom setting we administered the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSNF) (Van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2020) in courses designed with the Purposeful Course Design model. The courses were developed through a guided fellowship program led by an expert in course design. Of the ten fellows that completed the fellowship, eight gave the survey to their students at the start of the Fall 2024 semester to gauge their sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in previous courses at Ely. This was completed by 147 students. At the end of the semester, the faculty gave the survey again to the same set of students this time asking about their perception of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in that specific course. The post-survey was completed by 98 students. As seen in Table 10 all three elements of self-determination theory had a statistically

significant improvement in the courses designed using the Purposeful Course Design model ranging from .00001 to .02 using a p-value of .05. The pre and post survey were compared using a mean of means paired T-test to calculate significance.

**Table 10**

*Pre/post Student Survey Results BPNSNF*

| | n= 147 | n= 98 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre | Post | Change | Percent | P-value |
| Autonomy | 3.45 | 4.22 | 0.76 | 22 | 0.004 |
| Competence | 3.78 | 4.40 | 0.62 | 16 | 0.02 |
| Relatedness | 4.51 | 5.10 | 0.59 | 13 | 0.00001 |

## Comparison to Previous SDT Research

Findings from this study compliment other empirical studies done on self-determination theory and education. The Purposeful Course Design model was based on findings that have shown specific strategies increase a student's sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. While most of the previously cited studies are looking at one or two aspects of SDT, the Purposeful Course Design model pulls strategies from multiple studies to see if all three can be improved with intentional design. As seen in Table 11 below, this is a useful study supporting previous findings and recommendations to increase autonomy, competence, and relatedness in an educational environment demonstrating the positive impact of combining information from multiple studies.

**Table 11**

*Research Findings Compared with Previous Empirical Research*

| Study | Theme | Sample | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| Providing a Rationale in an Autonomy-Supportive Way as a Strategy to Motivate Others During an Uninteresting Activity, Reeve, Johnmarshall; Jang, Hyungshim; Hardre, Pat; Omura, Mafumi (2002) | Can a motivation control for an uninteresting activity provided in an autonomy-supportive way help the person see value in the effort they put forth during the uninteresting activity? | 10 college students (102 females, 38 males) in sections of an introductory educational psychology class at a large midwestern university. | Extrinsically motivated behaviors can become self-determined if there is an autonomy-supportive rationale for the value of the effort put forth. |
| What makes lessons interesting? The role of situational and individual factors in three school subjects, Tsai, Yi-Miau; Kunter, Mareike; Ludtke, Oliver; Trautwein, Ulrish; Ryan, Richard, M. (2008) | Does an autonomy-supportive environment impact students' interest in a subject? | 261 7th grade students in Germany followed over a 3-week period | Autonomy-supportive climates and perceived cognitive autonomy support increase student interest, especially if they didn't start with high internal interest. |
| Engaging students in learning activities: It is not autonomy support or structure but autonomy support and structure, Jang, Hyungshim; Reeve, Johnmarshall; Deci, Edward L. (2010) | Is student engagement highest when both an autonomy-supportive environment and structured environment are present? | 133 public high-school classrooms in the mid-west were observed; 1,584 students in grades 9-11 surveyed | Autonomy support and structure both were positively correlated with and predicted students' behavioral engagement. Only autonomy support was a unique predictor of students' self-reported engagement. |
| Student autonomy and course value: The unique and cumulative, Haerens, Leen; Aelterman, Nathalie; Van den Berghe, Lynn; De Meyer, Jotie; Soenens, Bart; Vansteenkiste, Maarten (2013) | The impact of relatedness and autonomy support, and structure on student motivation. | 74 teachers, PE lessons total; 43 secondary schools in Belgium | Findings imply that the more frequent the implementation of the strategy to support autonomy, relatedness, and structure before and activity, the better the educational outcomes. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Student autonomy and course value: The unique and cumulative roles of various teacher practices, Patall, E. A.; Dent, A. L.; Oyer, M.; Wynn, S. R. (2013) | The role of the three basic psychological needs for the decline of academic intrinsic motivation in an accelerated longitudinal cohort design among teenaged students. | 1 high school in the southeast, 30 classes, 278 students | When students perceived that teachers identified the importance and usefulness of coursework and considered students' interests and opinion when creating class activities, student's autonomy need satisfaction was the highest. Giving students choice and perspective-taking increased course value for the students. |
| **This Study: Student Flourishing Through Faculty Flourishing: Self-Determination For All** | **The study examined the impact of a course design model based on strategies that have been found to support a student's sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.** | **1 university in the southeast, 8 classes, 8 faculty, 97 students completed the post-survey** | **Students' sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness increased in classes that were designed with strategies based on SDT when compared with the same students' experiences in classes that did not use these strategies.** |

It is recommended that the Purposeful Course Design model continues to incorporate findings from empirical research and study its impact on a students' sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. While this model is based on research showing improved learning outcomes, future research could also collect data on student learning outcomes to continue to cross-reference it with SDT.

**Qualitative Findings**

*Students*

Overall, about 75% of students responded "yes" to the question "Do you think you are flourishing in this class at Ely, why or why not?". This is an increase in percentage from the more general pre-intervention survey question, "Do you think you are flourishing at Ely, why or why not?" to which students responded yes around 66%. The "no" remained consistent around 16%, but "unsure" decreased from 15% to 9%. In responses to "Do you feel like you are flourishing in this course, why or why not" students alluded to different elements of self-determination theory supporting their overall experience illustrated in Table 12 below. Column *A* indicates autonomy supporting statements, Column *C* indicates competence supporting statements, and Column *R* indicated relatedness supporting statements.

**Table 12**

*Student reflective statements about their sense of flourishing in the post-course survey overlayed with SDT*

| Student Quote | A | C | R |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes, I feel I have produced work that is satisfactory, and the work that hasn't been satisfactory has still taught me valuable things. | x | x | |
| Yes, the layout and professor within this course make me feel like I am flourishing. The work is understandable and very interesting to learn- I see how it applies directly to my career aspirations. | x | x | |
| Yes, I'm understanding things, I'm getting good grades, I'm making friends in class, and I don't feel overwhelmed with the amount of work. | x | x | x |
| Yes, I have learned a lot in this course, not only about the material, but also about me: I never would have thought I would have [been] capable of picking up bugs. First lab of this class I was looking at other natural science classes as soon as you mentioned bugs, snakes, and spiders. | x | x | |
| Yes, I felt I was challenged in a constructive way both by the teaching team and the students | | x | x |
| Yes, I absolutely feel like I am flourishing, because every day I am learning something new in this class. Art making also pushes me to improve my ideas and pivot direction even if it feels uncomfortable at first. It's all about exploration, and I feel compelled to keep trying and creating in this class. | x | x | |
| Yes, because we have experienced a communal pattern of mutual support and invitation. | x | x | x |
| Yes, because I had autonomy, there were opportunities when mistakes made for it not to impact grading, TAs cared about me and asked me about my life. I didn't have to be anyone else. | x | x | x |
| Yes I do lol. this course has been great because it has led me to make some very important developments (especially with the way I interact and show gratitude towards the nature around me), because it's a great environment but also because the course has given me space to do so. Dr. Z is not just fair, he is also quite giving and understands that learning is something that has to be nurtured to be developed, not simply measured. | x | x | x |

Students who responded “no” or “uncertain” in both the pre and post survey often had outside factors impacting their sense of flourishing. This is also supported by results from Deiner’s flourishing scale, discussed below, that remained stable pre and post survey. For example:

> *To some extent. I feel like my flourishing has been inhibited by both my personal things in my life and also some other things.*
>
> *No, I'm not completely unhappy with my performance but I don't get to spend as much time as I would like. The classes are fun though.*
>
> *No, I feel like I am grinding, like the little engine that could. I have a lot of responsibilities outside of the course that are important but take away time and energy that I could be devoting to my studies.*

A few mentioned confusions about the course structure or grades, however, most of these came from the same compressed course. This indicates that different styles of courses likely have different student and curricular needs. Students shared:

> “Not particularly, I felt confused about what I was supposed to be learning.” *autonomy/transparence is frustrated; possibly competence although it is unclear if they were confused about the structure or the content*
>
> “No, because I am still worried about my grade and the final exam. However, I do feel like I’ve learned a lot in this course and am decently prepared.” *autonomy is frustrated by feelings of lack of control around grades, a controlling function of education, however competence seems to be supported*
>
> “No because expectations were not clear. Wasn't sure how or what to study. I'm relaxed since much of it feels like review, but I don't know if I should be working harder or how to do that.” *autonomy/transparency frustrated, competence seems high*

Confusion around materials, purpose of assignments, and pedagogical approaches are sometimes felt even when they are based on research-based practices for learning (Brown et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2014; Deslauriers et al., 2019). This indicates that more time may need to be spent at the beginning of courses to make sure that students understand the reason decisions are made about the course to better support student autonomy. Grades are a controlling yet inevitable factor in many educational settings (Krijgsman et al., 2017; Ryan et al., 2023), including Ely University, so while there are strategies that can be in place to help reduce that control-induced anxiety, it is difficult to completely remove, and some students may react to this stressor more than others.

Ongoing research should continue to explore and develop targeted strategies to address these frustrations. The BPNSNF is a useful tool in this regard because it can help highlight which of the three needs should be further developed. In this case, autonomy could be better supported based on these student observations.

*Faculty*

Faculty also reported student flourishing in the classes. For example:

**Fellow 1:** "[A student] told me that choosing her own research projects gave her ownership of the project and also she talked about giving feedback to each other among the community is really a community building process for her." *autonomy, relatedness*

**Fellow 10:** "I think one very positive experience that came out of this was, I thought of doing stuff that is not standard classroom lecture activity and I took them on a field trip and I think there was very positive feedback. It was very nice for them to do something different. And it was very nice to them for them to see how it connects the stuff we did in

class. I don't think I would have thought of it if I hadn't had the idea of thinking outside the box." *autonomy, competence*

**Fellow 6:** "I talked a lot more explicitly about student flourishing and community and reflecting on process and students seemed to respond well to that because then they kind of knew what I was doing. And I even talked about some of the data that we had gone over as a way to convince them, but also just to make it so there was assumed benefits to it, and students liked that. And they also liked when I explicitly talked about autonomy and gave them choices in how we were going to proceed. They seemed to enjoy that…I would ask them how they felt the sense of community was in the class, even when they were like, yeah, it's good, but we could be doing better, they still kind of took ownership over some of it when I talked about it more explicitly and a little bit more objectively, instead of assuming that they were getting some of it or that I was even doing it". *autonomy, relatedness*

The qualitative findings support the increase students felt in the autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the quantitative data as well as the connection of flourishing to self-determination theory. Furthermore, when asked what flourishing meant to them in both the pre and post surveys, "growth" was the most used word and description further validating the approach to support student flourishing using SDT supportive strategies, as SDT contends that growth cannot happen when one's basic needs are not satisfied.

**Diener Flourishing Scale**

Students were also given the Diener Flourishing scale (Diener et al., 2010) which asks eight questions about flourishing in general, not just in the classroom. The Diener scale was

developed to measure aspects of human functioning beyond psychological well-being to include things like having meaning and purpose in life. Unlike the BPNSNF, this scale does not assess the individual components of what creates overall well-being. In the development of the Diener Flourishing Scale, well-being aspects were correlated with the more general Basic Needs Satisfaction scale (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné, 2003), from which the BPNSFS was derived, which showed a high correlation of .54 to .67 (Diener et al., 2010). Each question is answered on a 7-point scale from strong disagreement to strong agreement. The lowest flourishing score possible is 8 and the highest is 56. Pre and post surveys had scores of 47.43 and 47.29, respectively. These results align with qualitative data that suggests while a singular course experience can improve flourishing in a specific environment, one course does not have a significant impact on one's overall sense of flourishing, as seen in some of the "no" and "partial" comments above. Similarly, when Robert was asked in his final interview about students flourishing in his course he said:

> *I think students are flourishing more. I think so. But I think part of the structural problem that we have that is clear to me that affects the flourishing we've not really talked about in this group is all of the demands on students' attention outside of the classroom. It's like the attention economy as a whole is coming at the expense of their flourishing and it affects in the classroom. It's the reason why brain rot is a real thing, and I think it does affect our students. They're constantly expected to be on all the time and it's draining and it's not positive and it has all sorts of feedback effects and spillover effects and constant time spent online and increase a sense of loneliness and they come to the classroom and they think they have a harder time…but that's a big structural problem that the loneliness and technology that really hasn't been a part of this group.*

This is in line with the purpose of the project to explore how Ely University can better support student flourishing in the classroom and acknowledges that this is just one aspect of a student's college experience. Continued collaborations with campus life should help address holistic student flourishing at Ely University.

**Conclusions**

Triangulating the student survey results, comments, and faculty observations suggests that the Purposeful Course Design model that focuses on course alignment, designing for learning and designing for flourishing is an effective way to design courses to better support student flourishing in the classroom. While this doesn't significantly change their overall sense of flourishing in life, it is a critical part of the student experience at Ely. The positive results in the classroom space will be useful information to include as the university continues to look at overall student flourishing and wellbeing initiatives. Continued research should still measure students' overall sense of flourishing to see if as students experience more courses designed to promote flourishing there is a tipping point where SDT-supportive classes do impact their overall sense of flourishing.

**Actionable Knowledge**

As this work continues at Ely, there is a vested interest in continuing to align students' in-class experiences with their out-of-class experiences. From this work, a strong partnership with campus life and the Office of Student Wellbeing has emerged. Further work will look at how we can continue to implement Purposeful Course Design more broadly at the institution and holistically support both faculty and students doing this work. What is learned from this research about how to do that work is explored in the second research question.

## Research Question 2 Findings: Individual, Group, & Systems Learning

Research question two asks *What is learned at the individual, group, and system levels that advanced the theory and practice in an action research project about including the elements of autonomy, competence, and relatedness of Self-Determination Theory in courses to support student flourishing?* The findings about individual, group, and systems learning are complimentary in that they, piece by piece, unveil what is happening at the systems level through individual and group experiences. The qualitative findings are compiled from exit interviews with the AR team, focus groups for the Purposeful Teaching Fellows, researcher notes and reflections, AR team meeting transcripts, open-ended questions given to the faculty fellows, and the pre/post student surveys. There is evidence of clear learning and actionable take-aways at all levels.

### Individual Learning Part I – The Researcher

My individual learning is a duality of what I have learned about myself as a leader of change and a researcher, and what I have learned about the people and organization that I am working in about including the elements of autonomy, competence, and relatedness of Self-Determination Theory in courses to support student flourishing. Ultimately this exploration was about how to change the way that courses are taught at Ely University – a change initiative depending on both technical and adaptive change. My understanding of how I can more successfully operate and influence a system has grown immensely through this work which can be summarized in three key points: 1) The need to create space for change; 2) Systems thinking 3) People, groups, and systems need a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to flourish.

*Creating Space for Change*

Creating space for change was not a concept that I was familiar with at the start of my doctoral journey, but I was introduced to it early on as seen in one of my first reflections in the program from July 2022:

> *Something I've been flipping around in my mind over the past few months is the idea to "not be a problem solver" or "you are not here to solve a problem" versus my original interest and intention when I enrolled in this program, which was to explore ways to be a problem solver in a position of minimal influence and power. Action research is about making change, and change that addresses a problem, so I find these two ideas on the surface to be contradictory. What I actually think the difference is, is that I am not out to diagnose, intervene and solve the problem on my own as a policy, education, or organizational expert, rather, I am here to help guide the organization through the process of diagnosing and solving a problem together. I am drawn to the concept of creating the space for change.*

Creating the space for change was something that has stuck with me throughout my journey in this program. As a leader I have learned to slow down to let things simmer and emerge. I learned to create space for change within myself and how I approach faculty development. I learned what it means to be an action researcher and a reflective practitioner, finding the space to ruminate and balance input and production. As I began this work, I spent over half a year meeting with people to learn more about Ely's student flourishing initiative before I started making any plans, and it was another few months before I met with my AR team. I have never spent that much time collecting data and identifying partners before beginning a project and what I learned was, it is worth taking the time to find and build critical

collaborations. Not everyone is as vested in the project even if they are interested, but when I found those who were, it made the work much more influential at multiple levels within the institution. Four months after my first ah-ha moment with creating space for change I was still reflecting:

> (11/11/22) *I am learning that I really like thinking about, and participating in, organizational development and change. I recognize areas where I've done this before but didn't have the language, but I really appreciate bringing it altogether to make it a cohesive practice with strategies and guidelines…I think I need to spend more time reflecting (which I tend to do anyway) – but more intentionally. Really think about all of the perspectives being brought to the table and why people's goals and interests might differ from my own.*
>
> *…It's been helpful to think about change not as the goal, but as creating a space FOR change. It's not just me leading the charge and having to have all of the ideas, in fact, that won't even work. It's supporting dialogue – something OFTEN left out in change initiatives—it's supporting respectful conflict—but not by ignoring it or walking away from it—it's to find a new space to operate for everyone.*
>
> *…This is helping me reframe change in a way that others might see the value and want to participate—to help align it with what they also value and their realities. I am trying to complain less and just move forward! Observe, reflect and plan, not observe, preach and complain :D.*

Interestingly, in my learning about what faculty need to flourish, time is one of the top things mentioned. The need for time to rethink and rebuild their courses to better support student flourishing. They need the time for change; they need the space for change:

**Fellow 2**: *Maybe some additional help is to give more space in terms of time and support for faculty to participate in [course development programming]*

**Fellow 4**: *Well, I need more time and thinking about a broader picture, like, for me to do the changes that I want to make, I need more time.*

**Fellow 9**: *This conversation kind of makes me think like what we're asking for is time to prepare and think and not do, but what Ely needs us to be doing the whole time is doing. And so that it seems you can't really have one without the other, or it's just really challenging to have one without the other. But it seems like the value is always placed on the end product. We do this to our students too. We just grade the thing that they did and we don't grade the process along the way, but we need a culture around that, that we value the process as well as the end product.*

A reflection on this work is noted by Tom in the final AR team meeting,

*I can't thank you enough for you are a doorway from my point of view into a lot of places that are harder for folks to do what I do to get into. So, thank you. You kind of put on steroids what I thought was going to take many, many, many years. Only taking many, many years.*

As I continue this work and new initiatives, I will always bring my shift in perspective about change in an organization. It is not about actually creating the change, no one person can do that. People create change. What is necessary is creating the space for people to change and supporting them through that process.

*Systems Thinking*

Peter Senge introduced the idea of *systems thinking* in his book *The Fifth Discipline, The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (2006), first published in 1990. The premise and research say that to create lasting change in an organization, the organization has to be a learning organization that is able implement these five disciplines: *Personal Mastery*, *Mental Models*, *Building a Shared Vision*, *Team Learning*, and *Systems Thinking*. Systems thinking is the compilation of the other four disciplines – it is the system working together bridging theory and practice. Without going into extended detail about each disciple, my learning and growth as a systems thinker has impacted my ability to work with my AR team as a learning organization.

Personal mastery, having a high level of proficiency, is seen in our early work developing a shared language around student and faculty flourishing and purposeful course design, one of the most mentioned types of learning at all three levels. Without this fluency, we would not have been able to create mental models about student and faculty experiences.

Mental models are images, stories, and assumptions of what we think we know about the people, experiences, and world around us. What is critical from a learning organization perspective is the discipline of managing mental models. Are we able to examine the mental models? When they remain unexamined, they remain unchanged. This is closely linked to group level learning – learning from each other and from our different experiences. As a team we explored a mental model for student flourishing through a theory-based course design perspective. If this remained unexamined and the focus remained solely on the course design, we would have missed the critical element that for faculty to do this work, they also need to flourish, as seen in Robert's final interview:

> *A learning moment was just to think about wellness and flourishing at the student level--you can't detach that from faculty. So, the conversation we had about faculty flourishing, which I get wasn't really the objective of the project. I think it is, you get to think of this at a community level that if the faculty is not flourishing at the classroom, neither are the students, if the students aren't flourishing, faculty's not going to flourish and have what they need to succeed in the class.*

From these mental models around student and faculty flourishing, we were able to build a shared vision. A shared vision is what can make an idea reality. It provides a focus and energy for learning to occur. It encourages experimentation and risk-taking. Generative learning happens when people are trying to accomplish something that is deeply meaningful to them. It expands one's ability to create by taking an abstract idea and turning it into something to strive for. Personal visions come together to create shared visions when people's individual visions become a piece of the whole. Building a shared vision is where organizations can create commitment rather than compliance, and even better, enrollment. Enrollment means people choose to opt in to a shared vision, often with great enthusiasm. Our AR team has been able to enroll both individual faculty through the Purposeful Course Design Fellowship, and I have been able to enroll other departments in this course design process as well.

Team learning is about the ability to think together, bring complimentary skills together to create something new and unique. It requires facilitation, patience, and dialogue. This is what the AR team did for eighteen months and is a critical component of the action research process. As such, details about our group learning are explored in the section below.

And that brings us to systems thinking. Systems thinking is about seeing wholes, interrelationships, frameworks. It is about making sense of complex situations and seeing the

structure in messy spaces. It is the way that people can make sense of seemingly helpless situations. Systems thinking entails seeing circles of reality as opposed to straight lines- seeing the causality and interrelationships between all the pieces rather than a simple cause and effect. A critical piece in mastering systems thinking is the feedback loop, and this helps move beyond linear thinking. At the start of this research project, if asked, I probably would have said that I was a systems thinker, I am instructional designer, after all, and that is a system. However, what I have learned is that my systems were much too small! I was not engaging with the system at all. The systems include spheres of influence, organization priorities, organization values, and recognizing espoused values. It includes faculty and students, yes, but also administrators and campus life professionals. It includes classes and experiences outside of class. I have learned that in order to influence change at the systems level, that the system has to be involved and have a voice.

*People, groups, and systems need a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to flourish*

After completing this research, it is quite evident that, through the lens of Self-Determination Theory, to flourish in any environment people need a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This was evidenced in the student survey results, discussions with the action research team, and Purposeful Teaching Fellows. This research helped highlight to me how we can better support student flourishing in the classroom as well as faculty flourishing. Faculty flourishing is complex because that can take place at the individual, group, and systems level as each sphere of experience has influence. What was learned is explored in greater detail below, but what stands out to me is the interconnectedness of both SDT and the action research process. Each has three core components that are critical to learning and flourishing, and to be successful at each level of learning, a sense of autonomy,

competence, and relatedness is needed. SDT is an individual theory and not a lot has been explored at the group and systems level, but there is evidence to suggest that not just individuals, but groups and systems as a collective need this to thrive, as seen in Table 13, pg. 129.

**Individual Part II – AR Team & Purposeful Teaching Fellows**

The AR Team and Purposeful Teaching Fellows experienced individual learning in the following areas:

1. Self-awareness
    i. For students to flourish faculty need to flourish
    ii. Purposeful course design has impact
2. Increased competence around flourishing, self-determination theory, and course design
    i. Language and meaning
    ii. Strategies
    iii. Alignment
    iv. Class vs. holistic flourishing

Many of the AR Team members and Purposeful Teaching Fellows reported an increase in self-awareness in the language around student flourishing, how it impacts students, and the connection between student and faculty flourishing. Their competencies increased in their ability to discuss what it means for students to flourishing, what it is that faculty need to flourish, and the relationship between the two as seen in these final reflections:

> **Angela:** *I think when I thought about student flourishing before I was thinking about feelings of success, contentment…and I think what the project has done for me has helped*

*really expand that to think about how it's truly a tiny sliver. The stuff I have control over is a tiny sliver of their whole sense of self. And that's a gift in some ways because it takes the pressure off of me to balance their lives, but on the flip side of that too is how impactful minor changes in that sliver could be to their overall wellbeing.*

**Fellow 9:** *I think you provided a definition of flourishing, but I just thought it was a nice marketing word put into this is what we do at Ely Flourishing. And so, to know that there was this history behind it and what it really means and that talking about the importance of identity of self in that you're making sense of the external world knowing a little bit more about your internal world, I think helped frame how a course could be designed to sort of facilitate that process. As opposed to just feeling like, oh, well at the end of your Ely education, you feel taken care of, it helped me figure out what that actually means and what the classroom could look like.*

**Tom:** *I went from having initial reactions of like rolling my eyes. Like, can't we just not talk about faculty for one moment and just talk about the students...because that's my constituency...and the more I'm growing and learning about, you know, collective impact about systems, of course it's all interrelated. And I got beyond my own bias about faculty status and was really able to, I think, better hear, understand, and then see the intersections between how improving one improves the other impacts the other in a positive way....So that was the biggest ongoing thread that I'll carry out of this is getting*

*over my own bias and really listening with much more kind of openness to kind of real ecological model for wellbeing on our campus or flourishing on our campus.*

They also learned about Self-Determination Theory in an educational setting and course design strategies that support both student learning and student flourishing:

**Robert:** *The self-determination theory really stands out for me and those three aspects and that sense of autonomy to give student choice and ownership of their project. And also the competence. I used more quizzes this semester because of that factor and also to relatedness. I really like it to the sense of community building.*

**Diane:** *I think I learned a lot considering I wasn't really used to the language and stuff. So obviously I know what the word means, but I didn't know how it pertained to students in the classroom specifically and kind of what those changes would look like in order to promote flourishing. So, I went from pretty much not really realizing this was even a concept to really kind of being able to implement it in my classroom…[Initially] I thought that it was more about making the students happy because, it's Ely and they're paying a lot of money to be here, and school satisfaction or education satisfaction. But I think now I see that it's more like almost creating citizens if that's not cliche.*

**Fellow 2:** *Self-Determination theory was a real revelation. I think the two main things I got from being introduced to that theory and then having all this time to think about what it actually looks like in person or in real life is first the relatedness piece. From the beginning I said, that's kind of instinctively how I've taught, but it was really nice to have research that sort of backs up that that is a good way to teach And so I was able to be*

*more explicit about it with the students. We spent a lot of time at the beginning of the class talking about building a learning community.*

For both the AR team and the fellows, an increase in self-awareness around their perceptions of student flourishing coupled with an increase in ability to implement strategies to promote it had a big impact. There was enough flexibility in the design strategies that they still had autonomy over how to implement them, and their increased competence gave them the confidence to try new things in the classroom. Doing this work together and learning from each other fulfilled their need for connection (relatedness) and brought a shared enthusiasm to their learning.

**Group Learning**

Group learning was found in the following areas:

a. Meaning of Flourishing
    i. Shared language
    ii. Course design for flourishing
    iii. Holistic Flourishing
b. For students to flourish faculty need to flourish
    i. Central support
    ii. Formal Recognition (promotions, raises, awards)
    iii. Financial
c. Student flourishing and faculty flourishing is reciprocal
d. Collaboration is critical
    i. Across units
    ii. With central support (e.g. CFDE, Campus Life etc.)
    iii. With faculty

Everyone shared that discussing the meaning of flourishing with the group added to their understanding of the term. Beyond discussing what it meant specifically in education and SDT, it helped to have common language at Ely University around what it meant and what it could look like in the classroom:

> **Fellow 9:** *It was great to have a community of folks to bounce ideas off of. And I feel like some of that is just a shared language. And I feel like there's sometimes the messaging from the institution level from the school or from your own department or whatever it is, can feel there's kind of a log jam. And so some sort of unified demonstration that these are the things that we do and this is why we do them and the fellowship did that for us. But it'd be nice to see the deans talk the same language or the department chairs or whoever it needs to be. That would go a long way to making it easier to move these changes ahead. I think people can hear it and agree with it, but until there's a little bit of pressure we are still busy.*

> **Robert:** *We don't have certain common definitions of some of these terms across. It's because we don't have these conversations often across disciplines. And so just getting to a common language was part of the early learning goals…I got a really good appreciation for how the big umbrella, calling it flourishing or wellness, whatever it is, how that varies. And the needs vary across disciplines in different stages of students' career and the types of courses. So, things I do in my class, I think the early good fit for my class aren't the best fits for other kinds of classes. And so, I think it's important to have these conversations to think about the entire life course of a student going through a university to ensure that we are aligned on kind of shared goals.*

Group learning around Purposeful Course Design was seen in faculty sharing different ideas and approaches to try in their classrooms. This was especially true with the fellows' group who shared experiences around course design for almost a year:

> **Fellow 7:** *For some of the activities that we had in class students had a very positive response…I had this one activity where they could choose out of many activities on how to apply the knowledge that they were supposed to have gotten from the recorded lecture. So, they had to write a poem, and over half the class chose that, and it ended up being some kind of a freestyle session. So, there was clapping, there was rapping, and it was almost like they were trying to do a video, so it kind of evolved into something else. And I just thought that was amazing how they took that and ran with it.*

One of the first group discussions was about being able to support faculty doing the course redesign work for student flourishing and it was immediately clear that for faculty to be able to support student flourishing, they themselves need to be flourishing in their teaching responsibilities. A task force analysis, early interviews, and AR team meetings highlights faculty needs like time, central administrative support, feelings of validity around improving teaching practices, formal recognition, and financial support were discussed and verified again in final interviews and meetings.

> **Diane:** *I think it boils down to time where we're pushed to do so many things. I think as academics, and I think truly we want to be good professors and role models…but I think we get bogged down in all the to-do lists and things that we have to do that it's hard to find that protected time to really and put the effort into it…and I'm talking from kind of the research perspective that we're pushed to do so many things…I think having that liberty, that luxury of time is a big factor.*

**Angela:** I *mean the rubber is not gonna meet the road until tenure and promotion has a different category related to pedagogy.*

As a group we also identified the circular nature of student and faculty flourishing – when faculty feel good about their teaching, students flourish more, and in return, faculty also flourish more:

**Diane:** *I think I got a broader picture of kind of what it means to flourish. We talked about it at the student level, but even at the faculty level it's rewarding to see your students light up and come back a year later or whatever and tell you how they're doing and what they're doing now and seeing them place themselves in the world.*

***Researcher:***

*So what do you think other faculty should know about student flourishing?*

***Robert:***

*One that's connected to your flourishing. I think seeing your experiences invested in their flourishing is important or else it's going to, some faculty might say, this isn't really my problem. This is a campus life problem. Or we will just make resources available if the students aren't flourishing, they should go seek out help. That your experience as a faculty member is much more positive if you are flourishing, kind of in concert with your students. That requires faculty to be a bit more vulnerable. And that's hard. But that's what I really love about teaching is we flourish together.*

The last major group learning was that collaboration is critical to an initiative like student flourishing. Ely University tends to work in silos of silos and breaking out of specific

departments, schools, central support units and roles highlighted both shared experiences and unique needs that need to be addressed for something as big as student flourishing to happen.

> **Tom:** *It clicked for me that like what I'm trying to do in terms of a whole campus system had to deal with my own resistance in listening to faculty complain about being faculty and go like, but they're a part of our community and I'm trying to address the whole community. That means their welding has to matter. I just had too much cognitive dissonance that I had to resolve. And so, I think just spending time with them, which is often how you deal with a bias is to improve empathy. So, I just remember that shift and I was just much more open.*

> **Fellow 6:** *I also found it helpful to just talk with everybody in our group. I found that to be really beneficial also to give us a sense of community and especially outside of the departments and our kind of a little purview - to expand beyond our small purviews.*

> **Kevin:** *The interesting part for me was the diversity of the group. We had business, nursing, theology, I'm in the college. But just finding similarities and differences and just observing that there are more similarities than differences. Obviously, there are sort of structural differences between the different programs or schools, but when it came down to it on a basic level there were a lot of similarities in terms of the three categories, right? Autonomy, competence, relatedness and I think I thought that was interesting in and of itself, sort of proof that this is a good distillation of a pedagogy. Just the fact that in different schools, different age groups we teach vastly different age groups different*

*subject areas these three core ideas were still relevant and present in all our courses.*

**Angela:** *I would not have had a single clue who Tom was without this project. And that has been my biggest learning from the group, was figuring out who these conversations partners are across campus. That was so helpful…just seeing Tom's willingness to take suggestions and feedback and do stuff with it. Of the group, he clearly has the most institutional power by a mile, by several thousand miles and money. And it was just really cool to be a part of a think tank that he was helping enact. Because I think a lot of the stuff we do in committee work, whatever it looks like, often feels like we're screaming into the void, but this felt like we're actually talking to a person who's sitting right here and who's going to do something about it. This is so cool.*

The essential group learning of the shared meaning of flourishing, the connection between student flourishing and faculty flourishing, and the critical role collaborations play in this work was critical as we moved from group learning to systems learning.

**Systems Learning**

Systems learning was found in the following areas:

1. Central administrative support necessary for a student flourishing initiative
    i. Faculty aren't trained to teach
    ii. This work needs dedicated time
    iii. Varying needs of faculty
    iv. Good teaching doesn't impact tenure and promotion (T&P) decisions
2. System-wide collaborations are necessary to impact the system
    i. Common language

   ii. Shared interests and goals
   iii. Shared resources
   iv. Holistic student flourishing – both in and out of the classroom
3. Localized ownership – give the work back to the faculty
   i. Faculty teaching faculty
4. Cultural Tensions
   i. Language and concepts: e.g. flourishing vs. rigor - not an either or, they are complimentary
   ii. Organization values research over teaching as evidenced in its promotion practices
   iii. Siloed practices in the organization

Like findings at the group level, systems level learning also highlighted the need for central administrative support for faculty in order for faculty to support student flourishing. Faculty are not trained to teach at the systems level, they are not given dedicated time to improve and invest in their teaching practices, and faculty needs vary as they come to Ely with varying experiences in teaching. Investing in teaching excellence, though technically a requirement for tenure and promotion (T&P) considerations, does not improve one's ability to get promoted.

> **Tom:** *Are we walking the talk? Our system of reinforcement of what we say is important in terms of faculty's role, how we support and enable promotion and tenure. And then we say teaching is important, but it's not. And really we don't reinforce that with dollars or time.*

**Angela:** *I think the systems level stuff that has to keep going is continuing to convene faculty and administrators across the different units because it does not matter how much nursing or business wants to do something if there's not institutional investment system wide. I think this has started that ball rolling in some helpful ways…I think the key is going to be making it super clear this is not an additional thing that faculty have to do. This should be a regular revision of your syllabi and your course design should be a part of what it means to be faculty. And again, that speaks to the larger system things that Tom keeps saying that there's going to have to be investment at the administrative level to name to faculty that this kind of work is compensated and honored.*

System-wide collaborations are necessary to impact the system. The major intervention—the Purposeful Teaching Fellowship—would not have happened without a collaboration between several groups. Like individual and group learning, systems learning in a shared language, meaning, and interests around student flourishing is critical to its success. It's critical to the bigger mission of holistic student flourishing, of which flourishing in the classroom is a piece. Shared resources allowed us to create the Purposeful Teaching Fellowship in 2024 for 10 faculty and expand it in 2025 to 18 faculty in addition to introducing the model to several other groups in the university.

**Kevin:** *Partnerships are important, right? Thinking about how Scott (Director of The Purpose Project), we didn't start off with him in mind but at some point he came on board, and he brought money with him. So, I thought that just sort of reemphasized the importance of partnership and then partners with money. I thought that was a sort of a welcome addition. Also, clear that there's an appetite for, or a need for this type of*

*thinking and work on campus. You think of how involved and excited Tom is--he doesn't teach a class--but he's still very very excited.*

Interestingly, while Ely needs system-wide collaborations to expand the vision and mission of the work, we need localized ownership, that is ownership at the department level, to implement the work more broadly. We need to give the work back to the people by having people like the AR team and the faculty fellows share what they have learned with their colleagues.

**Fellow 2:** *I guess the other thing is just broader awareness of this approach to our work within our units and our teaching. And again, that's probably my responsibility to evangelize [my] school about it. But I do feel a little bit like some of this is counter-cultural. And so, you know, when my colleagues find out that we spend three weeks building a learning community and activities around that, they might be like, when are you going to get to the serious learning? And so, having more people exposed to this conversation I think would probably be good.*

**Fellow 6:** *I've been attempting to convince other faculty within visual arts to do some of this and apply it and think about changing how the classes are taught, but more about like creating a structure that is more consistent across classes. So, then it helps students to have kind of a sense of continuity.*

**Robert:** *The fellowship program I think is great. I think it's the fact that it keeps growing and that's how culture changes. We talked about this in the last meeting, that those faculty go back to their departments and they've gone through the teaching fellowship to*

*talk about flourishing. They can share those ideas with their faculty members and with their chairs and their deans. I think that has a huge effect. And so the more that we can support that program, embellish that program, make it year-round, make sure all the schools [are] represented.*

Lastly, the systems learning highlighted several tensions that will need to be reconciled should this work continue. Several people shared how focusing on "flourishing" can be perceived as a cost to "rigor". Team members and fellows from several different colleges said that this misperception needs to be addressed head on and use data to show faculty that this is not the case – rigor and flourishing are, in fact, complimentary:

**Tom:** *I think they should know that it is only to their benefit to value student flourishing. It is in no way a cost to them...I know everyone's a little bit different, but I would be very curious for anyone to actually have factual concrete statement that would disagree with this. It is 100% aligned with what they want out of students. Unless you want to punish students, you just want to punish them for punishment's sake or hurt them. We are all aligned in wanting to get the best out of your students academically, creatively in their work product, whatever that is, in whatever disciplines and their ability to be good productive humans, both here and after graduation. We all want them to graduate and represent Ely well and their research and their departments well. And those things are 100% aligned. And I think that's, as you've heard me say a few times, that's the thing I hear the most is in terms of resistance…It's in some way a threat to rigor, a threat to performance, that students are fragile snowflakes…*

*I care about telling the story of how when create conditions for better flourishing, that*

*rigor doesn't suffer. So, I'm trying to listen for stories and strategies, and this be a conversation that hopefully many of us have for a very long time. So, it doesn't feel antithetical, it's not a binary. But it's that they work with each other.*

Another organizational tension is that Ely is an R1 school and prioritizes research over teaching as evidenced in T&P decisions, awards, prestige, visibility and financial support. Until teaching is seen as an equal to research, it will be difficult to have a complete cultural change around student flourishing.

**Diane:** *We still have to publish things regardless if it's research or not, so you still have to write those books and whatever. I don't know if I can speak for everybody, but I think that's probably the biggest hurdle that we have, is to overcome that culture of publish, publish, publish. Cause we can't do both. Well, I feel like one, if you're going to publish and do that well it takes a lot of time and effort and you're then not going to go the extra mile. I think you can still be a good professor, but you're not going to make those changes that are hard if you don't have the time.*

**Kevin:** *I think for me the next big step is…making that connection to scholarship. I think if people could also see that connection. I'm doing this because I should be, but there's an opportunity for me to design some sort of self-study or educational study around what I implement in my classroom practices and either having a community or framework or just the expertise for someone to be able to come to a group or a space and sort of map out an educational research project and collect the data and have someone to bounce ideas off of. I think that's a really good next iteration, I don't know, evolution or whatever you want to call it.*

Lastly, for true systems impact, departments, colleges, and units need to break down the traditional silos of working independently to share resources, share knowledge, and share a vision - it needs to be a learning organization – to truly have significant impact. It needs to become a part of the institutional culture:

> ***Robert:*** *I would like to see like that connective tissue between campus life and the academic life become thicker. These are good conversations to have, but the university [isn't] really set up that way and so if you don't commit to it and like build those structures, it's just not…strong enough…I would like the university to keep investing flourishing. That puts their money where their mouth is makes it actionable.*

> **Tom:** *How do we make this something generative beyond the actual timeline of the research. How do we have this become something embedded…so that it doesn't become a one-off, but becomes we have to have this, whatever this is, like we have to have faculty involvement. We have to create space for creativity and risk taking in the classroom for the purpose of student flourishing. We have to pay attention to faculty flourishing from a variety of perspectives, wellbeing, retention, engagement, etc. so that [we're] creating something that's more generative [and] ongoing - I watched us do that too… How do we engage the administration to help both of these things…Those are just critical conversations. It helps us push against all the siloing that every university has, helps us engage in the full ecology of our campus and really create the necessary conditions for addressing systems.*

Systems Learning provides insights on next steps to not only sustain the work that the AR team started but grow it. Cultural change is at the heart of what was learned about the system. The organization is interested in student flourishing, well-being, and purpose, but it needs to continue to expand collaborations and decrease siloing. It needs to continue to establish a shared language and meaning thus empowering faculty and students to collectively invest in these ideals. Once institutional collaboration and support is established, allow departments the autonomy to discuss and implement these ideals in a way that is best for them. Cultural change includes revisiting established values and acknowledging tensions. Time is one of the biggest tensions for faculty because they are asked to do many different things but are only rewarded for some of them. There are still misperceptions and tensions around what it means to support student flourishing and well-being. Ways to continue this work and build on what we've learned is discussed below.

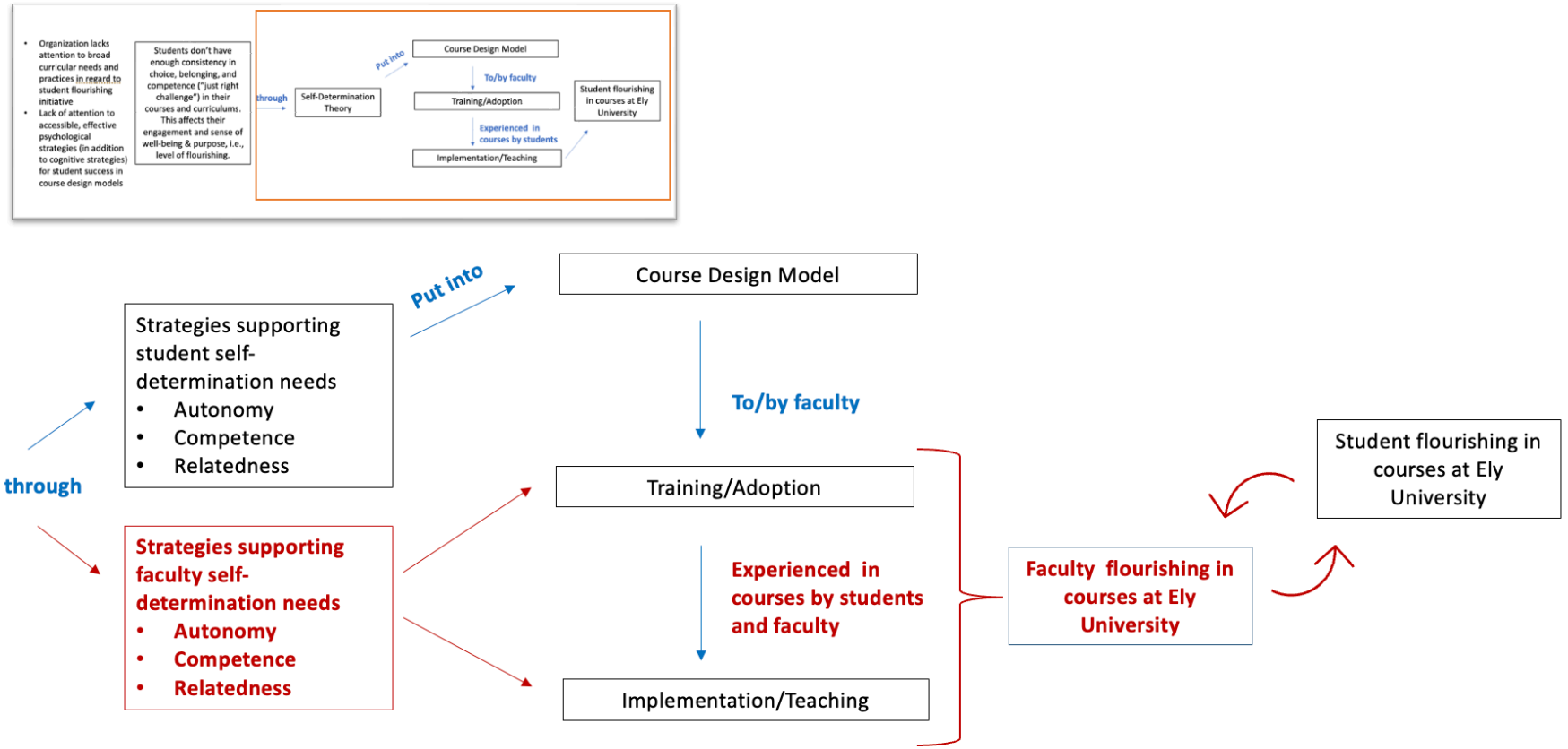
## Actionable Knowledge

At every level of learning the principal finding was that for faculty to be able to learn about course design for student flourishing and implement the strategies that better support students' sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom, the faculty themselves need to feel like their own autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported in their teaching responsibilities at Ely. For students to flourish, faculty need to flourish. It was also found that student flourishing in class promotes faculty flourishing, the two are complimentary. Students and faculty are the foundation of higher education organizations- the organization does not exist without them. Thus, faculty flourishing in their teaching practices becomes an organizational issue and the organization needs to support and promote this. Reviewing the original Theoretical Framework, Figure 3 p. 21, what we learned about the course design model

remains the same. However, we also learned that we left out a major component and that was the people needed to do this work, the faculty, and their SDT needs. As we can see in the updated Theoretical Framework, Figure 9 below, SDT strategies still go into the Purposeful Course Design model, but there needs to be equal focus on the strategies to support faculty in the training process and implementation. Through attention to both we should arrive at faculty flourishing and through faculty flourishing we arrive at student flourishing, which in turn, continues to support faculty flourishing. The updates are highlighted in red.

**Figure 9**

*Updated Theoretical Framework for Student Flourishing*



The research findings provide insight into what faculty need to have their own sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness met at Ely University, compiled in Table 13, below.

**Table 13**

*What faculty need to flourish in their teaching through the lens of SDT*

| Autonomy | Competence | Relatedness |
|---|---|---|
| **Organizational Support and Legitimacy:**<br>• **Capacity** - *time*<br>• **Organization validation** - *promotion recognition through T&P; financial*<br>• **Value** - *flourishing is a legitimate concern for faculty* | **Training on Purposeful Course Design:**<br>• **Common language and meaning of flourishing**<br>• **Strategies to support flourishing in the classroom** - *operationalize the concept* | **Collaboration & Relationships:**<br>• **With other faculty** – *shared language, values, and mission*<br>• **With central units** – *shared language, values, and mission* |

## Autonomy

Faculty autonomy can be supported through organizational support and legitimacy. Increased faculty autonomy means faculty need to feel like they have the capacity to put in the time it takes to do a full course redesign. Competing pressures like publishing, hiring, writing grants, and other committee work often interfere with the time it takes to intentionally develop a course well before it is intended to run. In interviews with both the AR team and the fellows, the need for time to do intentional course redesign repeatedly came up. Many fellows said that it took a lot more time to develop their course than previous courses that they have taught, but the payoff was worth it. Both the students and faculty enjoyed the class more.

Organizational validation was another theme that was seen in both the AR team and fellows. Many said that tenure and promotions were solely based on research, publications, and

grants, and that teaching excellence was not rewarded. Similarly, the institutional focus on flourishing needed to be valued beyond words.

**Competence**

Faculty competence can be supported by training them in the use of the Purposeful Course Design model and pedagogy. In this finding, the value of shared language was the most evident. The term "flourishing" can be defined in many ways as seen in the Chapter 1 literature review, so agreeing on a common definition and implementation at Ely was extremely important to everyone who was interviewed. Ely did not have strong definitions for flourishing, so this was an opportunity to help the organization make practical meaning and application both in the classroom and beyond. SDT is not the only way that Ely is defining flourishing, but other critical groups like Campus Life is onboard with this language and partnering in is application. Similarly, the need for concrete strategies to support SDT in the classroom was both appreciated and impactful. This demonstrates the need for ongoing and additional training opportunities. Several people mentioned that they would like to bring Purposeful Course Design to the colleges or departments as a next step.

**Relatedness**

Faculty relatedness can be supported by strengthening and prioritizing collaborations and relationships. Similar to shared language, working with other faculty was a huge part of the success and learning. Both the AR team and fellows repeatedly reported how much they enjoyed interacting and learning from people in other disciplines and units on campus. The connection with Campus Life was especially meaningful because faculty and Campus Life rarely interact with each other and both groups had impactful learning from each other. This is a relationship that will continue to blossom in a large part thanks to the relationships that were built during this

research. Faculty and staff often work in siloes and this work demonstrates that building strong relationships across the university is necessary for systems change.

**Discussion of Findings and Related Literature**

Similar findings in the readiness for change literature suggest that what faculty at Ely University need to support their flourishing is what organizations in general need to promote change. For organizational learning to happen, creating the potential for organizational change, you need an environment that allows individuals to take charge of their own learning and interact with those around them. Upon examining the readiness for change literature, it appears that for organizational change, organizations also need a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as a collective to be open to and ready for systems-altering change. Table 14 below reviews literature around systems change through the lens of SDT and there are many similarities with what faculty at Ely University need to flourish in their teaching practices.

**Table 14**

*Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness Needs at the Organizational Level*

| Autonomy | Competence | Relatedness |
|---|---|---|
| ***Free*** informed **choice** (Argyris, 1970) | **Valid information** (Argyris, 1970) | **Need a strong relationship with interventionist to start, and a strong relationship with others to continue** (Argyris, 1970) |
| **Ability to eventually not rely on the interventionist** (Argyris, 1970) | Free ***informed*** **choice** (Argyris, 1970) | **Message from change agent will be shaped by the social interpretation of the message.**<br><br>*Social differentiation theory* says that the response to influence change attempts will be determined by the target's cultural or subcultural membership.<br><br>*Social relationships theory* says that responses to an influence will depend on the network of relationships individuals have.<br><br>(Armenakis et al., 1993) |
| **Support structures for the "edge of chaos" – complex adaptive systems** (Burnes, 2005) | **Team learning** (Senge, 2006) | **Building a shared vision** (Senge, 2006) |
| **Systems thinking** (Senge, 2006) | **The need to operate at the "edge of chaos"** complex adaptive systems (Burnes, 2005)<br><br>**Efficacy** – the perceived capability to overcome the discrepancy (Armenakis et al., 1993) | **Team learning** (Senge, 2006) |

**Autonomy and Competence**

Though the language may be slightly different, both the literature on change and what faculty need to feel a sense of autonomy and competence is free, informed choice, valid information, and internal commitments to the choices made (Argyris, 1970). At Ely this means that faculty have the information and skills they need to implement Purposeful Course Design as well as the time and flexibility to do it in a way that is meaningful to both them and their students. The organization is committed to this work as evidenced through promotions, time, and pay, and taking it further, willing to operate on the "edge of chaos" (Burnes, 2005), that is, willing to make space for new thinking and the trial and error that comes with that.

Systems thinking is a combination of the personal mastery, mental models, building a shared vision, and team learning. Not surprisingly, this requires a sense of competence – of understanding – about the system and the changes that need to be made. It is based on the system as a whole, never the actions of a single person. The problems of the system are collectively shared and no one person is responsible (Senge, 2006). This means that for systems thinking to occur, there needs to be a sense of autonomy at the organizational level obtained through mutual understanding, valid information, free informed choice, in relationships with others who work there.

The two other things mentioned in autonomy and competence are: 1) not relying on the interventionalist (Argyris, 1970) and 2) efficacy – the perceived capability to overcome the discrepancy (Armenakis et al., 1993). Not relying on the interventionalist means building a self-sustaining culture and support network around student and faculty flourishing. This is what Tom meant when he referred to creating a system that is "evergreen". Regarding efficacy, it has been

found that individuals will avoid activities that they do not feel capable of doing, that is, activities where they do not perceive a sense of competence. It is necessary, therefore, to increase the member's perceived ability to complete a new task, but this needs to be done at the organizational level to have a collective impact creating the need for organizational competency (Armenakis et al., 1993).

*Relatedness*

Relatedness at the organizational level says that it needs a strong relationship with interventionist to start, and a strong relationship with others to continue (Argyris, 1970). This is in line with the research showing that faculty need relationships with each other and with central units. Relationships with central units will help build the competence around the language and strategies, and relationships with other faculty will build a community of practice, provide a support structure, and provide a space for creativity to emerge. Building a share vision and team learning (Senge, 2006), also seen in autonomy and competence, rely on genuine relationships with colleagues to shape the direction of the institution and learn from one another.

*Social differentiation theory* and *social relationships theory* are also not explicitly stated in the research findings, however, faculty reported how critical relationships with each other and the larger system are in this work. This supports what these theories say about the ability for an organization to change. *Social differentiation theory* says that the response to influence change attempts will be determined by the target's cultural or subcultural membership and *social relationships theory* says that responses to an influence will depend on the network of relationships individuals have. (Armenakis et al., 1993). As the work of student flourishing continues at the systems level, it is evident that it will be important for the university to pay

attention to culture, subcultures and networks of influence in faculty languishing and flourishing if they want to impact meaningful change.

## Limitations

While this study shows promising results in effectiveness and learning, there are several limitations. In continuing to study the Purposeful Course Design model, it would be beneficial to have a control group of students who did not have a major class redesign take the pre and post survey to compare with classes who did a major course redesign. This would allow us to see how the intervention compares more directly to classes that did not undergo a major change and identify courses that might already be supporting students' sense of flourishing. A larger data set will help us more clearly understand the landscape and needs of students at Ely University. As noted, it would also help highlight the specific needs of different programs and student groups enabling faculty to tailor more specific interventions to address differing student pressures.

In subsequent student surveys it would also be useful to useful to collect identifiers to more closely track individual student experiences. This study chose not to because it was studying the effectiveness of the intervention at the group level and was hoping for a high response rate, which it has. However, tracking specific student experiences will help show the change in experience on the individual level and might show if the intervention has a greater impact on different demographics of students.

Finally, the faculty involved in this study opted in because they are all very interested in teaching with a student-centered approach. It would be interesting to invite faculty to participate who view teaching more traditionally, i.e. prefer to lecture, or primarily consider themselves researchers first and teachers second to 1) see what type of learning would occur for them and 2)

if there are different ways that they would want their autonomy, competence and relatedness supported.

## Conclusion

Through this study it is evident that all constituents at Ely University would benefit from a stronger sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness thus increasing their feelings of flourishing whether it is students or faculty. What this looks like specifically for each varies but is embedded in a need to feel a sense of choice and control in one's teaching a learning, the ability to learn and grow in skill, ability, and thought, and a connection with others.

The findings in this research are important because efforts to increase students' success, well-being, engagement, flourishing etc. often focus on the technical support – the money, the programming, the structure – but not the adaptive work of support for the implementers, collaboration, and enrollment in the change. This clearly illustrates that if a college or university wants to have the downstream results of student flourishing, it needs to do the upstream work of creating an environment that supports the people *doing* that work. Self-Determination Theory is a universal lens through which to view this work because it has been studied and applied in numerous contexts always telling us the same thing: to thrive, to grow, to flourish, one's basic needs to be met. This is evident for students, this is evident for faculty, and this needs to happen at the organization level. As one AR team member reflected at the end of our work, ***"****It's not an either or. There is such a gift in recognizing that the classroom space can be a space of wellbeing for everyone who is there. And to see...how much better a teaching experience it can be when you lead with this kind of design model."* Thus, we get to student flourishing through faculty flourishing, self-determination for all.

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# Appendix A

## Purposeful Course Design Handbook

PURPOSEFUL COURSE DESIGN

# Course Alignment

+

# Design for Learning

+

# Design for Flourishing

*So students feel **empowered and confident** in their learning and problem-solving and **feel a sense of belonging** to their schools and their larger human community.*

(Ryan & Deci, 2017 p. 354)

Course:_____

*Purposeful course design puts student learning and emotions at the heart of every course. It consists of research-based practices in cognitive and skill development coupled with research on ways to promote student well-being and flourishing.*

*Use this guide to explore ideas and develop your course.*

## Flourishing in Education

"Flourishing" is a term that dates back as far as Aristotle and is still being discussed and researched today. Though not the final say on what flourishing looks like in an educational setting, researchers Richard Ryan and Edward Deci describe flourishing through an educational lens:

> "By flourishing, we mean becoming motivated, vital, resourceful, and fully functioning adults. Flourishing individuals feel both empowered and confident in their learning and problem solving and feel a sense of belonging to their schools and their larger human community…
>
> …The promise and hope of school is not only that they enable and enhance cognitive learning and growth in specific subject areas…, but also that they facilitate the development of high-quality motivation, engagement, participation, citizenship, and social-emotional well-being. The capabilities for engagement and self-regulation will likely be more serviceable in subsequent life than any particular facts learned in the schools…they should not discourage, demotivate, or kill the confidence of the students they serve or leave them feeling alienated, reactive, excluded from society, or more antisocial."[1]

[1] Ryan and Deci, *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness*.

## Core Values in Purposeful Course Design: Autonomy, Competence, & Relatedness

### Autonomy:

Different aspects of autonomy include providing choices in learning (materials and practice), autonomy-supportive vs. autonomy-controlling environments, and structural elements like grading, evaluation, and mastery. Empirical research shows that the more students feel they have a choice in how they participate in the course, the more perceived self-worth, intrinsic motivation, and cognitive competence they have. Overall, students learn better.

### Competence:

"*Competence* concerns the feeling of mastery, a sense that one can succeed and grow. The need for competence is best satisfied within well-structured environments that afford optimal challenges, positive feedback, and opportunities for growth"[2]. Competence supports curiosity, exploration, and manipulation—all critical components of learning. It's a "just right challenge", where students aren't bored because it's too easy or discouraged because it is too hard.[3]

### Relatedness:

Relatedness, also referred to as belonging, has to do with people feeling socially connected, feeling cared for by others, and feeling significant among others. It also is connected to people giving to others and being part of larger social organizations. A lot of language around flourishing is about connection and purpose—both to other individuals as well as to values and communities.

In course design, social connection is often seen in focusing on building a community of learners through icebreakers and introductions at the start of a semester, facilitated discussions, and group work. However, what is often missing in traditional models is helping students connect the course to a larger purpose. How does it relate to the context of the curriculum? How is it relevant to you outside of class? How can you connect it to community-based or experiential learning like internships that you participate in? (*Connecting to purpose also supports competence and autonomy!*)

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[2] Ryan and Deci, "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation from a Self-Determination Theory Perspective."
[3] Vygotsky, *Mind in Society*.

# Components of Purposeful Course Design

## Column A: What is course and curricular alignment?

- This is the first step of course design. The first column in the course review helps you **look at your course in relation to where it sits in the university, in your school, and in your program**. Knowing this will help you better facilitate exercises around course purpose.
- Course alignment, starting on page two, helps you **keep your course goals tightly connected** to your choices in content and materials, learning activities, and assessment. You should be able to draw a line connecting all pieces.
- Alignment is a critical educational component in **inclusivity, transparency, accessibility, and equity**. It communicates to students what you intend to do, why, how, and your plans for feedback about their proficiency in completing these plans (i.e. grades).

## Column B: What are student-centered course design practices for learning?

- Column B reviews widely researched and accepted course design and pedagogical practices that best **support student learning**.
- These include many practices from universal design for learning (UDL) and inclusive pedagogy that focus on providing **accessible and inclusive practices** for a variety of learning needs, and **active learning** – keeping students involved and engaged in their cognitive and skill development with practice and feedback.

## Column C: What are student-centered course design practices for flourishing?

- Column C reviews strategies that support **autonomy, relatedness, and competence** in a course to support a student's **psychological growth**, **motivation**, and **sense of well-being**. Together, this can improve a student's overall feeling of flourishing.
- Drawn from Ryan & Deci's (Self-Determination Theory (SDT)[4], the elements of autonomy, relatedness, and competence are essential needs for psychological well-being in any environment, including education. *(This has been empirically researched from many perspectives, fields, and environments!)*

## These columns are not siloed!

- Columns A, B, and C are **interrelated**. Regardless of which lens you look through, you are likely **supporting multiple needs** by incorporating these research-based best practices.
- **For example,** strategies to support autonomy in the classroom include things like listening to students and considering their perspectives, giving them time to work and to talk, acknowledging improvement, and providing progress-enabling hints when stuck. Behaviors that lead to a controlling environment are things like not providing enough time for students to work or giving them the answers without allowing time for them to work, making demands or directives, and using direct questions to control the situation. The strategies that support autonomy in the classroom align closely with research-based best practices in cognitive development like active learning and providing continuous feedback, connecting to self, and expanding on known information, and could easily be emphasized as a way to support both psychological and cognitive growth.

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[4] Ryan and Deci, *Self-Determination Theory : Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness*.

# Purposeful Course Design Review Tool & Resources

## University, School, and Curricular Goals

| **Curricular Alignment:** *Connection of goals, content, activities, & assessments throughout a curriculum and course.* | **Designing for Student Learning** *Draws from Universal Design for Learning (ULD) and inclusive pedagogy practices that support learning, accessibility and equity, as well as cognitive and behavioral research around how learning happens.* | **Designing for Student Flourishing** *Draws from research around self-determination theory (SDT) and people's basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and belonging to thrive in any environment.* |
|---|---|---|
| **How does my course…** | **How does my course…** | **How does my course…** |
| **relate to the university, college, and program goals?** Where can I help students make big-picture connections? Do my course learning goals tie directly to content, activities, and assessment? | **design for learning skills and content?** Where do I include strategies to improve competencies in knowledge level and skills | **design for flourishing through SDT?** Where do I support psychological growth and well-being by providing choice, relatedness, and a just-right challenge? |
| **What are the university goals?** | | **Do the University Goals:**<br>☐ Establish a strong sense of purpose (*relatedness*)<br>☐ Connections to others (*relatedness*)<br>☐ Supports independence (*autonomy, competence)*<br>☐ Supports satisfaction with self (*competence, autonomy*) |
| **What are the school goals?** | | **Do the School Goals:**<br>☐ Establish a strong sense of purpose (*relatedness*)<br>☐ Connect to others (*relatedness*)<br>☐ Nurture independence (*autonomy, competence)*<br>☐ Support satisfaction with self (*competence, autonomy*) |
| **What are my program goals?** | | **Do the Program goals:**<br>☐ Establish a strong sense of purpose (*relatedness*)<br>☐ Connect to others (*relatedness*)<br>☐ Nurture independence (*autonomy, competence)*<br>☐ Support satisfaction with self (*competence, autonomy*) |

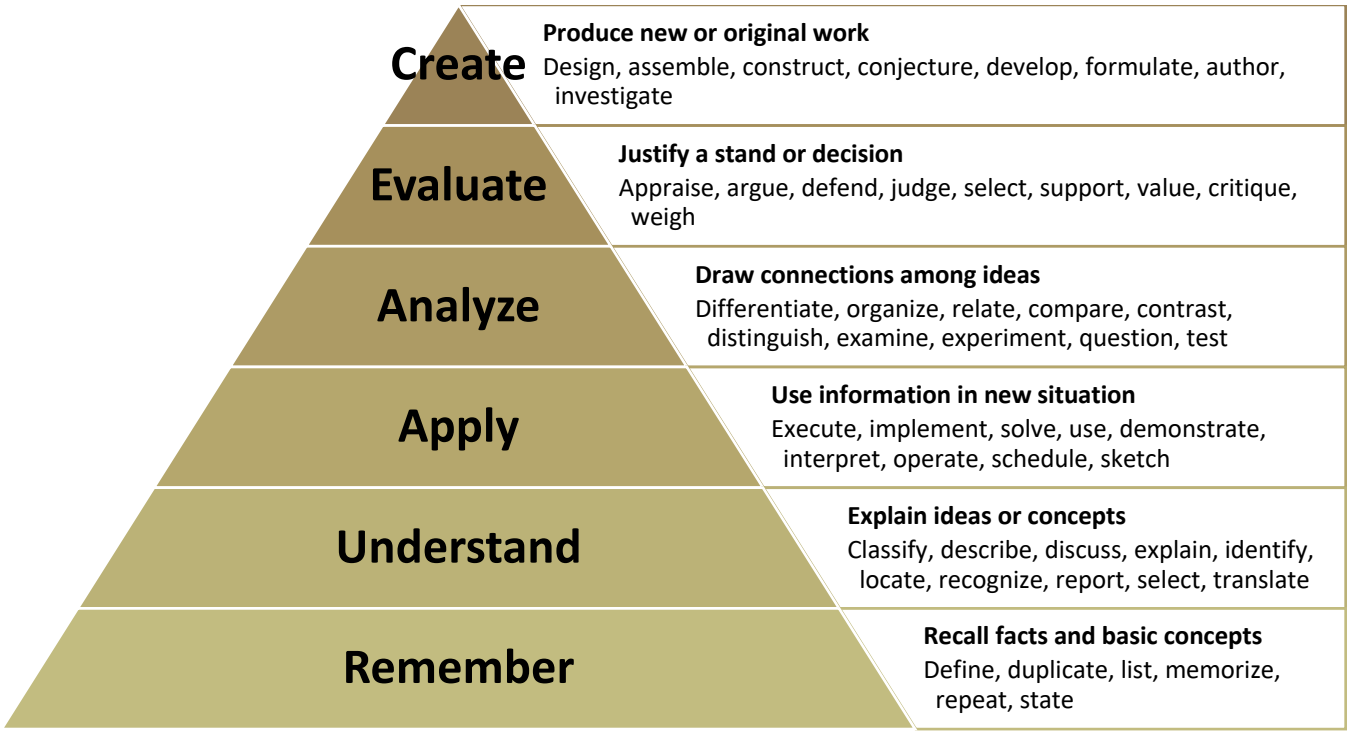
## My Course Goals

*Check all that apply; Use the space to generate ideas*

| Curricular Alignment | Designing for Student Learning | Designing for Student Flourishing |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ **Are actionable**<br>☐ **Relate to my program/discipline goals**<br><br>By the end of this course, students will be able to:<br>*Hint: Be specific-- what will they be able to do to demonstrate the skill or knowledge (discuss, explain, identify, recognize, design etc.)*<br><br>**What university goals do they relate to?**<br><br>**What school goals do they relate to?**<br><br>**What program goals do they relate to?** | ☐ **Link to program/school/ university goals**<br>*Within a curriculum, learning goals start at lower levels of skill and knowledge development and builds throughout a program.*<br>☐ **Show students how/where my course is connected in the curriculum**<br><br>**What level are the goals in your course?**<br>*All curricular goals should be introduced, practiced, and mastered within the individual course goals throughout the program.*<br>☐ Introduction<br>☐ Practice<br>☐ Mastery | ☐ **Establish a connection of the course within the discipline – purpose** *(relatedness, competence)*<br>☐ **Establish a connection of the course within society– purpose** *(relatedness, competence)*<br>☐ **Connect course content to self & broader academic interests** (*competence, autonomy, relatedness*)<br>☐ **Establish a community of learners** *(relatedness*)<br>☐ **Connect to broader community** (*relatedness, competence*) |

## Resources to Develop Course & Class Goals

*Bloom's Taxonomy*[5]




*Fink's Taxonomy of Significant Learning*[6]

**Learning How to Learn**
- Becoming a better student
- Inquiring about a subject
- Self-directing learners

**Caring**
- Developing new:
  - Feelings
  - Interests
  - Values

**Human Dimension**
- Learning about oneself
- Learning about others

**Foundational Knowledge**
- Understanding and remembering:
  - Information
  - Ideas

**Application**
- Skills
- Thinking (critical, creative, and practical thinking)
- Managing projects

**Integration**
- Connecting:
  - Ideas
  - Learning experiences
  - Realms of life

[5] Anderson, Krathwohl, and Bloom, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing : A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*.
[6] Fink, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences : An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses*.

## My Content

How do students get course information? Readings, media, experiences, observations, lectures, images etc.

*Check all that apply; Use the space to generate ideas*

| Curricular Alignment | Designing for Student Learning | Designing for Student Flourishing |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ **Maps directly to all of my course goals**<br>☐ **Is needed for all of my learning activities**<br>☐ **Is needed for all of my assessment options** | ☐ **Uses a variety of modes to deliver information**[7] (*supports learning, accessibility, and equity*)<br>○ **Text** – book, articles, web, journals etc.<br>○ **Audio** – lectures (online or in class), audio book option, podcast, video etc.<br>○ **Images** – graphs, charts, video, pictures, illustrations<br>○ **Experiential** – exploratory, lab, attending an event, community work, interview etc.<br>☐ **Represents a variety of backgrounds/views/cultures**[8] (*supports learning, equity, and transparency*)<br>☐ **Is accessible in Canvas**<br>○ Clearly labeled title document type (e.g.doc, pdf, etc. | ☐ **Provides students with choice in the way that they consume the information** (*autonomy, curiosity*)<br>☐ **Provides students with choice in the level of difficulty that they begin working with the content** (*autonomy, competence*)<br>☐ **Has room to adjust based on student feedback** (*autonomy, relatedness, competency*)<br>☐ **Contains real-world scenarios, problems, issues etc**. (*connection to something bigger, relatedness*) |

[7] Tobin and Behling, *Reach Everyone, Teach Everyone*.
[8] Addy, *What Inclusive Instructors Do*.

## Resources for Content

| Approach | Explanation | QR Code |
|---|---|---|
| Teaching with Video | Video is a great way to provide information and can free up class time for more interaction. Video can provide explanations, illustrations, examples, stories and, more. Use this guide to help you determine how to find ready-made video, when and how to create your own, and how to incorporate video into your course. | |
| Interactive Lecturing | Interactive lecturing will keep students more engaged and supports better retention. A few ideas:<br>• When you ask a question, have everyone write down an answer then share with a partner. This way everyone has a change to answer and talk. If time allows people can share with the class and everyone will have something to say.<br>• Use Poll Everywhere to ask questions during a lecture. Question types include multiple choice, "hot spot" identification on an image, short answer, and more! | |
| Open Educational Resources (OER) | Teaching materials and resources at no cost that can be adapted and redistributed. | |
| Library Course Reserves | Instructors make reserves materials such as PDFs, e-books, streaming media, and physical books available to their students via Course Reserves.<br><br>Students access their course materials directly through Canvas by clicking on the Library Course Reserves link within a course. | |

## My Learning Activities

How do students practice the learning goals? Experimentation, recall, iteration, etc.

*Check all that apply*

| Curricular Alignment | Designing for Student Learning | Designing for Student Flourishing |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ **Practice the actions that students will need to take to meet the course goals**<br><br>Learning activities overlap with content and assessments: they could be a way to acquire new information or interact with information they have been given.<br><br>A learning activity is anything that the students are actively doing to participate in their learning. Active learning requires feedback.<br><br>Learning activities might have feedback without a grade, a "low-stakes" grade, or a completion grade. | ☐ **Practice the verb(s) from the course goals**<br>☐ **Include multiple ways to practice and demonstrate competency**[9] *(learning, accessibility, equity)*<br>☐ **Give students timely, actionable feedback**[10] (what is going well, what they can do to improve)<br>☐ **Provide multiple opportunities for practice and feedback**[11] (*grows competence*)<br>☐ **Scaffold material as appropriate**[12] – break down larger projects into their component parts (*competence, growth, mastery*)<br>☐ **Include some or all of these strategies**[13]**:**<br>○ Recall (e.g. quiz, poll, flashcards etc.)<br>○ Repetition (e.g. multiple short assignments as opposed to one long one)<br>○ Mixing up the order of practice<br>○ Connection to self<br>○ Elaboration – relating new material to what you already know; explaining it to someone else; making something new, i.e. a song, poem | ☐ **Provide students with choice in the way that they practice:** interaction with content; skill development; competency development (*autonomy, competence)*<br>☐ **Provide flexibility to account for different learning needs** (e.g. extra support for those who need more practice, option to "test out" if competency is demonstrated)<br>☐ **Have group components** (*relatedness, competence*)<br>☐ **Foster creativity:** novelty – provides space for new idea/original ideas; adaptiveness/appropriateness to problem at hand; complete<br>☐ **Use fun and play** (*relatedness/deeply social, physically active*)<br>☐ **Provide opportunities for outdoor activities** (*relatedness, competence, physically active*)<br>☐ **Include community engagement opportunities** (*relatedness, competence, connection*) |

[9] Tobin and Behling, *Reach Everyone, Teach Everyone*.
[10] Ambrose et al., *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*.
[11] Ambrose et al.
[12] Ambrose et al.
[13] Brown, Roediger, Henry L. III, and McDaniel, Mark A., *Make It Stick*.

## Learning Activity Resources

| Approach | Explanation | QR Code |
|---|---|---|
| Active Learning | **Students interact with the course material during class.** Engaging with content, practicing skills, making mistakes, receiving corrective feedback and trying again are how we learn. Examples: Peer-to-peer discussion, problem sets, group work, labs, independent work time with feedback, reflection exercises, etc. | |
| Group Work | Group work helps build a community of engaged learners while giving students the opportunity to practice and develop different skills. | |
| Scaffold Activities | **Breaking larger activities or tasks into their component parts.** Breaking assignments or tasks into each independent pieces and receiving feedback before putting it back together allows students to practice and master the necessary skills needed to succeed before having to take on the additional challenge of applying them comprehensively. Taking it a step further, once students are able to perform the individual skills and successfully integrate them, they then need to learn the conditions in which the skills are appropriate for application. This is what enables students to transfer skills and knowledge from one situation or subject to another. | |
| Interactive Lecturing | Thoughtfully breaking up the lecture with short, low-key activities will help students focus on the material longer, gives students an opportunity to check what they do and do not know, and provides you with information about the students' retention—all of which numerous studies confirm will lead to better long-term retention. | |
| Feedback and Grading | Goal directed practice and targeted feedback support student growth and learning.[14] | |

[14] Ambrose et al., *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching.*

## My Assessments

| Curricular Alignment | Designing for Student Learning | Designing for Student Flourishing |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ **The performance or demonstration of the learning goals** | ☐ **Multiple ways to demonstrate competency** (equity, accuracy)<br>☐ **Formalized or combinations of previous learning activities** (transparency, equity)<br>☐ **Clear information on what the grading scale means in regard to demonstrated competency** (accessibility, equity, transparency)<br>☐ **Real-world application** | ☐ **Authentic scenarios/application** (*relatedness, competence*)<br>☐ **Connection to course, program, community, self** (*relatedness, competence, autonomy*)<br>☐ **Choice in demonstration of competencies** (*autonomy, competence*) |

## Assessment & Grading Resources

| Approach | Explanation | QR Code |
|---|---|---|
| Quality Assessment Practice | **Quality assessments should be reliable, valid, and free of bias**. When choosing your assessment, start with the learning goals. There are many effective assessment methods that can be used to demonstrate that learning goals have been met. Offer "low-stakes" and "high-stakes" options. Be creative and have fun! | |
| Feedback & Grading | To give the most accurate grade relative to learning outcomes and student performance, you should use **standards-based grading methods** in several different formats to compensate for the strengths and weaknesses for each type of assessment. | |
| Rubric Resources[15] | • Decrease workload and speed up grading<br>• Increase equity by providing transparent expectations and consistent grading<br>• Help with timely feedback which supports critical thinking and growth | |

[15] Stevens and Levi, *Introduction to Rubrics*.

# Additional Considerations

## Structure vs Control

> "Structure entails helping the student find a lattice to support them in their developmental climb, as well as clarity in goals and guidelines.
>
> Structure provides the helpful informational supports and guidance students need to develop skill, perform well, and function adaptively.
>
> …A well-structured environment provides opportunities for growth and challenge and supports when obstacles are encountered".[16]

We can provide structure with:

- Clear goals to strive for with a rationale
- Sharing a framework of the class
    - Promote autonomy by asking students to draw this first then discuss and compare!
- Scaffolded/guided activities and assessments
- Ongoing feedback
- Clear expectations
    - Promote autonomy by having students help develop expectations (e.g. participation, group work, attendance, late work, etc.)
- Clear rubrics
- An organized Canvas site!

**See Emory's Teaching Toolkit Resources:**
Quality Assessment Practices
Feedback and Grading
Rubric Resources

[16] Ryan et al., "Education as Flourishing."

## Teaching Behaviors

*Teacher Behaviors Shown Empirically to Be Autonomy-Supportive, and Those Shown to Be Controlling*[17]

| Teaching behaviors that promote autonomous motivation | Teaching behaviors that promote controlled motivation |
|---|---|
| • Listening to students<br>• Making time for students' independent work<br>• Giving students an opportunity to talk<br>• Acknowledging signs of improvement and mastery<br>• Encouraging students' effort<br>• Offering progress-enabling hints when students seem stuck<br>• Being responsive to students' comments and questions<br>• Acknowledging students' experiences and perspectives | • Monopolizing the learning materials<br>• Providing students too little time to work independently on solving problems<br>• Telling students answers without giving them an opportunity to formulate them<br>• Making demands and directives<br>• Using controlling words such as should and have to<br>• Using directed questions as a way of controlling the flow of conversation |

[17] Ryan and Deci, *Self-Determination Theory : Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness*; Ryan et al., "Education as Flourishing."

## Student Behaviors

> "Teachers' approaches to instruction affect students' motivation, functioning, and wellness. This observation puts the spotlight on the teacher, and justifiably so, given their important roles in the lives of students. However, this teacher-centric perspective on what happens in the classroom risks overlooking the important contributions that students make to their own learning and development. It also suggests that classroom activity runs along a one-way street in which teachers teach while students receive that instruction. It turns out that in reality it's a two-way street: just as what teachers say and do affects students' motivation and learning styles, what students say and do affects their teachers' motivation to teach and the strategies they employ."[18]

**When students are disengaged, instructors tend to respond by adopting an increasingly controlling approach to teaching**

- Researchers labeled this "pressure from below" because instructors felt like it was their job to get students engaged

**When students ARE engaged, the instructor experiences more satisfaction** of the need for relatedness which also leads to less emotional exhaustion!

### CRITICAL VARIABLE = STUDENT AGENCY

**Agentic engagement** is how proactively students engage with the material – speak up, contribute, share preferences etc.

- This improves both student and instructor engagement, satisfaction, and even performance!

**The more you can create an environment where students feel comfortable participating and sharing, the better it is for everyone.**

- Remember: increasing multiple opportunities for engagement and expression (from Universal Design for Learning) is support both accessibility AND student agency!

[18] Ryan et al., "Education as Flourishing."

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**Questions, comments? I'd love to hear from you! Contact me at *lwuest@ely.edu*.**