
PLA Schreyer Strategic Plan for Improving Health and Wellness

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Schreyer Stress Less Space

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INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) Constitution defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” [1]. Similarly, the HONOR 301 class defined health as “a state of mental, social, and physical well-being.” Further, the class defined wellness as the “multifaceted pursuit of reaching/developing a better version of yourself and your community.”

Each of these definitions alludes to health and wellness as a nebulous goal with many paths of achievement. With regard to institutions, the WHO further states in their constitution that “the extension to all peoples of the benefits of medical, psychological and related knowledge is essential to the fullest attainment of health” [1]. The Penn State values, as stated on their website, are respectively described as “[striving] for excellence in all our endeavors as...an institution,” and “[working] together for the betterment of our University, the communities we serve, and the world” [2]. In providing paths to achieving health and well-being, Penn State and the Schreyer Honors College can more effectively work to achieve these values.

As a prestigious institution that serves 100,000 students and 17,000 faculty and staff [3], Penn State has a duty to these students, faculty, and staff to not only provide paths to health and wellness, but make these paths accessible. As stated by UC Davis, “emotional wellness inspired self-care, relaxation, stress reduction and the development of inner strength...is an important part of overall wellness” [4]. This proposal will focus on these very strategies of achieving emotional wellness.

Project Background

This project aims to provide honors students with access to methods of reducing stress and achieving a more complete state of health and wellness. Stress, in particular, is a focus of this team because “when you experience mental fatigue [through stress], your mode of thinking has become unsustainable” [5]. Of the undergraduate students enrolled at University Park, 99.33% are pursuing 4-year degrees [6]. The length of these programs requires a sustainable approach to ensure the students can complete their education, as well as flourish after they have graduated. Rather than make admission to the university less competitive by reducing the difficulty of programs, Penn State should seek to provide methods to reduce stress and mental fatigue. Consecutively, improvements in mental health will present themselves through the success of graduates, both in their careers and in life.

An Exploration of Stress

Penn State is ranked #57, based on an average assessment of all programs, out of 1,921 competitive schools across the nation [7] by U.S. News: Education. Such a competitive program cannot sacrifice quality. Therefore, to provide students with the best educational value, Penn State should focus on eliminating the determinants of mental fatigue. This includes harming, “your ability to pay attention and concentrate...these situations are bad for your productivity and mental efficiency” [5]. Further, the Mayo Clinic confirms “stress that’s left unchecked can contribute to many health problems, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity and diabetes” [8]. Mayo Clinic further expands upon the negative impacts of excessive stress in Figure 1.

Common effects of stress		
On your body	On your mood	On your behavior
Headache	Anxiety	Overeating or undereating
Muscle tension or pain	Restlessness	Angry outbursts
Chest pain	Lack of motivation or focus	Drug or alcohol misuse
Fatigue	Feeling overwhelmed	Tobacco use
Change in sex drive	Irritability or anger	Social withdrawal
Stomach upset	Sadness or depression	Exercising less often
Sleep problems		

Figure 1. Negative impacts of stress [8]

The nature of participating in classes at Penn State entails work that is very demanding. For most students, taking classes full time has similar rigor to that of a job. The “Occupational Safety and Health Administration has declared stress a hazard of the workplace” [9]. This again justifies why Penn State should target stress as a negative component of education and attempt to remedy the ills it causes.

How the Culture of Honors Colleges Connect to Stress

The Schreyer Honors College, like many honors colleges and programs across the nation, aims to attract high-achieving students. This is done through providing benefits such as small classroom instruction, 1:1 faculty ratio, an enriched curriculum, research, independent study opportunities, and extracurricular activities. Typically, honors programs have extra requirements that must be upheld to maintain scholarships or to have graduation distinctions such as honors degrees and transcription notation awards. One commonality in honors colleges is the formation of a small residential learning community. This community gives honors students a sense of belonging that reflects their previous and current academic achievements. However, it is due to these privileges that the culture of honors programs is built upon high expectations, which causes high-achieving students to feel a significant amount of pressure and stress during their college experience.

Although all incoming college students face new challenges when beginning their college education, honors students face a unique set of problems. As concluded by Rinn and Plucker [10]: “Many academically talented students are comfortable with, and perhaps dependent upon, the strategies and support networks that have allowed them to achieve pre-collegiate educational success. Removing these supports and encountering increased competition may lead to unique problems that the majority of undergraduates never encounter.” The most current research on honors students has associated them with goals of perfectionism, feelings of isolation, fear of failure, a heightened need for approval, and a preference for solitude, supporting Rinn and Plucker’s [10] conclusion ([11], [12], [13]). Further evidence provided by Rice et al. [14] from two successive cohorts of 403 and 277 honors students found that they had maladaptive perfectionism, which is triggered by stress.

Honors colleges and programs aim to aid their students in overcoming these challenges and improving mental health while still being able to academically achieve in college. To accomplish this honors students have benefitted from the social environment of the honors program, which plays a key role in student success. ([15], [16]) Thus, in an effort to maximize student success and positive wellbeing while simultaneously minimizing stress in higher education, the Schreyer Honors College plans to add relaxation rooms to honors’ residence areas.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AND GOALS

The following is a comparison and relation between the visions and missions of the Schreyer Honors College at Penn State, and the HONOR 301 class.

Schreyer Objectives

To more effectively serve the Schreyer Honors College we recognize their mission as:

1. Achieving academic excellence with integrity
2. Building a global perspective, and
3. Creating opportunities for leadership and civic engagement [\[17\]](#)

The Schreyer Honors College vision is:

1. To educate men and women who will have an important and ethical influence in the world, affecting academic, professional, civic, social, and business outcomes.
2. To improve educational practices and to be recognized as a leading force in honors education nationwide. [\[17\]](#)

Our Mission

In order to meet these objectives we need to first allow students to improve their mental-wellbeing through mindful practices. Our mission is as follows:

1. Creating a space for students to practice mindfulness and to recenter their minds,
2. Bringing awareness to strategies that improve mental health in students, and
3. Providing Schreyer students with a convenient and accessible space to relax.

Our Vision

The vision that we have for the relaxation room, which will be called the Schreyer Stress Less Space, is to improve the social environment and culture of the Schreyer Honors College by cultivating a space where students are able to de-stress in an easily accessible area. We aim to lead Penn State University and the nation to improve education practices through the addition of these relaxation spaces.

BACKGROUND

Mental Health on Campus

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 85% of college students reported feeling overwhelmed at some point during the academic year and 30% believed stress negatively affects their academics [18]. Stress has been shown to decrease performance, health, and even the lifespan of individuals if exposed for extended periods of time.

80% of students feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities, but only 40% of all students struggling with any kind of mental health dilemma seek help [19]. On college campuses we see rises in stressors for students but a hesitancy to receive help or a lack of services for students.

Experts are seeing a decrease in the health and wellness of students on campus, representing an increase in the need for health and wellness assistance not based on higher enrollment but on deteriorating conditions [20]. The decrease of mental health conditions can be seen nationwide as students continue to see an increase in stressors in their undergraduate conditions. The increase in stressors and decrease in health and wellness is severely outpacing the funding and resources needed to counteract these issues. This trend is not likely to change anytime soon and the gap between necessary funding and actual funding will most likely continue to increase.

Other BIG 10 Schools

Although many of the resources offered are similar to those currently offered by Penn State, if we were to move forward with this plan, Penn State would be the *first* to have a space like this in a residence hall. We could become the pioneer of stress management resources for students, and lead the BIG 10 in student experience. Because Penn State is an extremely competitive school that could be compared to a number of other institutions, those that are most similar and offer the most accurate comparison are the members of the BIG 10 and other Pennsylvania schools:

The Ohio State University provides students with what they call the Stress Management and Resiliency Training (SMART) Lab. This lab allows students to use biofeedback software to reach a state of relaxation. This biofeedback software measures heart rate variability, how much the heart rate fluctuates over a period of time, and coherence, the alignment of heart rate and breathing. This biofeedback training is open for students to use either by themselves or in a one-on-one guided meeting [21].

The University of Michigan currently has a space dedicated to taking students out of their stressful everyday environment. They have named this space the Wellness Zone and it is run

through their university's CAPS system. This space features two massage chairs, headphones for meditation and music, video games and a TV. Other resources that the space provides are meditation pillows and yoga mats, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) lamps to simulate sunlight, and a biofeedback video game that allows students to monitor their state of relaxation on a self directed basis. This space is currently open for students from 8 am to 7 pm on Mondays through Thursdays and closes early on Fridays at 5 pm. This space is only open during the academic year [22].

Carnegie Mellon University has a space that they have labeled The Mindfulness Room. This room features natural light, comfortable seating, a craft area and many plants. This room is available to community members as well as students during the university's fall and spring semesters. Students are asked not to bring technology or school work and instead to be present in the space the room provides to allow themselves to truly relax. The room is occasionally scheduled for group meditations, but the appeal that this room brings is that it is open 24 hours a day [23].

Current Resources at Penn State

Health Promotion and Wellness Office

The Health Promotion and Wellness office currently offers programs directed towards improving the mental health of students. They currently train students under the title of "Wellness Ambassadors" to provide peer resources for students seeking help. These students host events titled "Wellness Wednesdays" and other workshops geared towards teaching different coping mechanisms to deal with stress and introducing changes students can make to live a healthy lifestyle. Dr. Linda LaSalle, the director of Health Promotion and Wellness, agrees that it would be entirely feasible to have Wellness Ambassadors host workshops in the Stress Less Spaces we hope to bring to Atherton and Simmons halls. Dr. LaSalle has expressed a great need for more mental health outreach and has seen first-hand how the Relaxation Room in IM has impacted students.

Relaxation room and Biofeedback in IM Building

The relaxation room at Penn State is located in the basement of the Intramural Building in room 20 of the Wellness Suite, shown here in Figure 2. The relaxation room is open from 8am-5pm on Mondays-Fridays. This room features zen gardens, puzzles, light therapy boxes, meditation soundtracks, comfortable seating, and biofeedback software [24].



Figure 2. Relaxation Room [24]

Biofeedback software helps to decrease stress levels and symptoms of anxiety and depression. It works by measuring physiological factors and producing visual images to cue the participant to physically relax their body [25]. These physiological measures include electromyography (muscle tone), respirations, and skin temperature which are used to guide progressive muscle relaxation and deep breathing [25]. Another component some biofeedback softwares uses is called autogenic training, which is a method similar to hypnosis in that it guides the participant into a state of relaxation. A study entitled, “Biofeedback-Aided Relaxation Training Helps Emotional Disturbances in

Undergraduate Students Before Examination” examines the effectiveness of this in Figure 3 with symptoms of anxiety consistently decreasing with biofeedback use.

Biofeedback software has been shown to decrease self reported symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress. It has also effectively decreased respiration rate , muscle tone, and

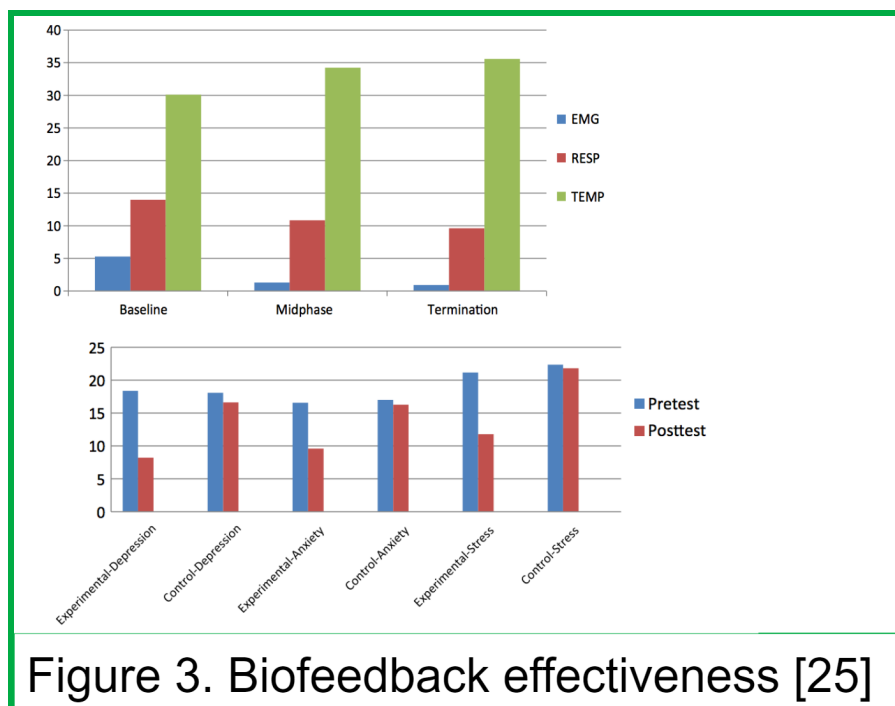


Figure 3. Biofeedback effectiveness [25]

increased skin temperature in the fingers—the warmth of your palms has been found to be linked to being relaxed [25]. Another study focused specifically on the use of biofeedback to control anxiety symptoms on college campuses has also found promising data [26]. Biofeedback has been found to allow the students to become more aware of their physiological processes and modify them accordingly in times of stress. As such, this study has deduced that “biofeedback training can be effectively used as a tool to decrease anxiety and stress symptoms, and could play an important role on campus health services” [26].

Being a resource we currently have at Penn State, it would be a necessary component to make accessible to students in the Schreyer Honors College. More specifically, placing the Relaxation Room in a location that is convenient and works around students’ hectic schedules would be beneficial.

In addition to the Relaxation Room, the Wellness Suite also features a Meditation Room which accommodates one person and is scheduled in 30 min. time blocks through myUHS [\[27\]](#). This is a new resource that the Wellness Suite has recently implemented to accommodate students' needs to become more centered.

ROOM LOGISTICS

Location and Layout

Simmons Hall would be utilized as the first building to house the Schreyer Stress Less Space. The conference room in 100F would be converted to a relaxation room. This room is indicated by the blue circle on the right side in Figure 4. Although the space is currently used as a conference room by the administrative staff in the remainder of Simmons 100, there is an available space adjacent to 100F that could be transitioned into the new conference room so that no space would be taken from the staff in this endeavor.

In Atherton Hall, a Stress Less Space could be implemented within the “Blue and White rooms”, C-001 & C-002, or within the basement of the building where there are currently study rooms. Currently, space in Atherton is managed by different parties, so we would have to navigate the optimal locations within Atherton, but given that this would be a secondary expansion of the Stress Less Space on campus, it is possible that in the coming years more space becomes available to introduce this method of stress relief.

Figure 5 shows the current layout of the conference room in 100F Simmons Hall. These pictures were taken earlier in the semester, and with classes moving to remote learning it is possible that the space has changed to accommodate a different level of activity.

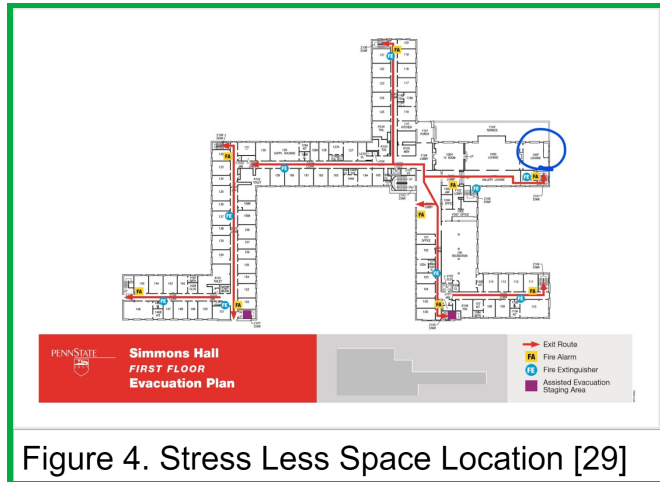


Figure 4. Stress Less Space Location [29]



Figure 5. Simmons Room 100F



Figure 9. Renderings of the potential room



Figure 10. Renderings of the potential room

Based on a brief visit to the space earlier in the semester, we have generated a potential layout for the space that can include the contents mentioned below and specified in the survey. Figures 9-10 include snapshots of areas of the room, and Figure 11 includes a bird's eye view of the layout. In addition to the furniture placed in these images, we anticipate storage of the contents in cabinets and student access to the resources included.

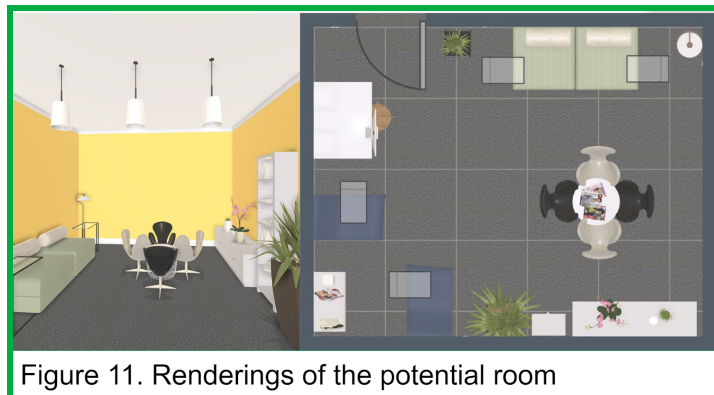


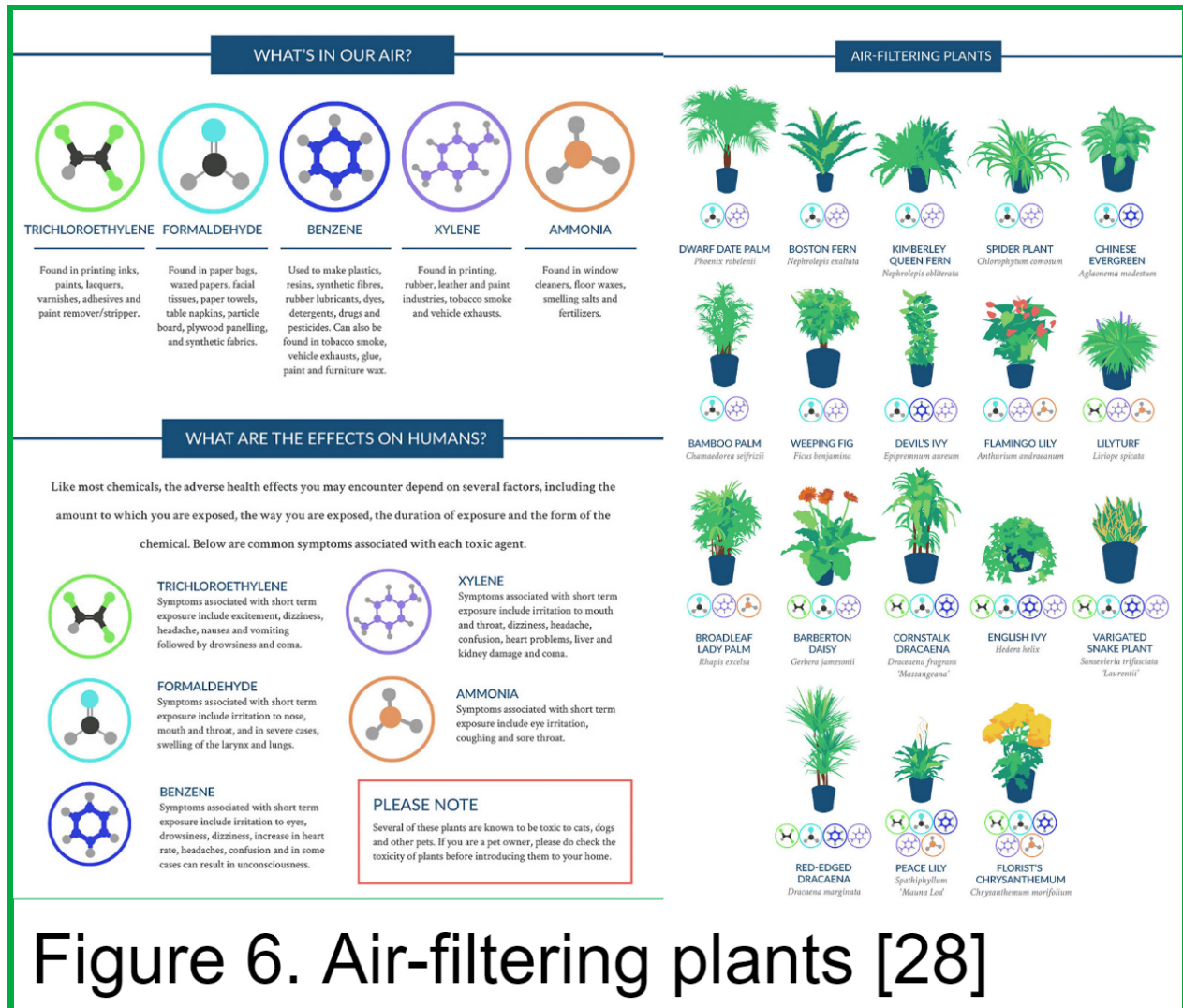
Figure 11. Renderings of the potential room

Should the space transition to a resource for stress relief, maintenance would continue as it currently does with the janitorial staff performing typical cleaning and maintenance of the room. To access this Simmons space, students must first swipe into the Simmons building. All honors students are granted access to the honors residence halls, so transforming the space would not require significant changes in access. However, as later data collection is performed and the potential of access is abused, it would be easy to install a separate swipe system at the door of the space should the need arise. Data could also be collected from this swipe system and could be used to adjust the hours of operation and gauge the level of student visitation to the space.

Contents

Based on feedback from Dr. Linda LaSalle, it is important to create a comfortable place that is calm and welcoming. Having a mural of nature landscape/scenery would bring students into this more relaxing mindset. Having plants, such as succulents and other plants that do not produce pollen, would help the space imitate the experience of being in nature. NASA recommends the plants featured in Figure 6 because they naturally purify the air and do not require full sunlight [28]. An Ipod or sound system playing rain sounds, calm music or soft jazz would help to build a calming aura in the room. We also plan on having comfortable and plush seating to make the room more inviting as well as making the experience as relaxing as possible. Another factor we plan to implement, would be the lighting, which should be soft and somewhat dim. We can follow the IM Relaxation Room and add a sun lamp. These mimics sunlight to help with seasonal affective disorder (SAD). This is especially important since State College tends to be gloomy and cloudy, which contributes to depression and can cause Seasonal Affective Disorder. There will also be a space for crafts, such as adult coloring books, a zen sand garden, and puzzles. These

all will facilitate student mindfulness and encourage students to take a few minutes to decompress by doing a simple game or coloring. Having an aromatherapy diffuser with scents such as lavender and patchouli would also create a calming space.



At Penn State, there is a student-founded company called Musical Minds that has developed brain wave sensitive headphones to recommend music that achieves a certain change in these wave patterns (e.g. goals to “motivate, focus, uplift and relax”) [30]. The founder, Alex Patin, explains that “the headphones utilize dry contact sensors to scan your brainwaves, which are then assessed using algorithms that will provide song recommendations.” The headphones exchange information to make these changes with “an app, which connects to your Spotify, Google Play Music, Deezer or Apple Music account via Bluetooth,” making the use of this technology more accessible to our users [30]. The existence of this technology and hardware

introduces the possibility of collaboration with a multitude of student organizations to enhance the space and further our mission.

In addition to each of these unique contents, we plan to provide students with instructional literature that enables stress-reduction at home. This could take the form of posters, pamphlets, links to websites, or even books that describe a variety of these tactics. The programs for stress relief held in the space can also provide students with physical stress-reduction strategies, e.g. stress balls, hot pads, finding the perfect playlist, etc. A similar method of distribution is infographics. Using this method of information-sharing, we can send out strategies with visual instructions in our emails, or with the Schreyer weekly emails (e.g. a stress relief tactic each week, sponsored by the Schreyer Stress Less Space!). This would not only achieve goals of reducing stress, but also encourage visits to the space as interest in stress relief increases.

Student Awareness

The Schreyer Stress Less Space would be advertised through the Schreyer newsletter, email chains, residential assistants, ResLife, faculty members, and Scholar Ambassadors. The Schreyer Marketing team could also be called upon to develop some materials to increase awareness of the space. Additionally, the incoming freshmen to the Schreyer Honors College could stop by the room at some point during orientation, or this space could be advertised to those new students at an appropriate point in time.

Should the plan be put into action and developed by the administrative staff, communication resources that are currently in place (e.g. weekly Schreyer emails, posters, word-of-mouth, etc.) would be the best form of awareness for the space. The largest advantage related to student awareness is the location of the space. Having a room in Simmons and/or Atherton devoted to relaxation and the achievement of health and wellness would be the easiest part of spreading awareness, purely because it is so convenient to stop by and use the resources inside. Although honors students living off-campus would not have the same convenience in terms of living space, they will have access to these honors residence halls which are more centrally located on campus. These students tend to stay later on campus to avoid travel back and forth between campus and their off-campus living areas. Therefore, space and time availability is of the utmost importance in providing an accessible space.

Current Schreyer Opinion

The current opinion of undergraduate students in the honors college was gained through a survey. Out of 56 responses, the honor students collectively agreed that they would utilize a

relaxation space if it was placed in the dorms due to their stress levels during the school year. The conclusive results from the study are shown below in Figures 7-8:

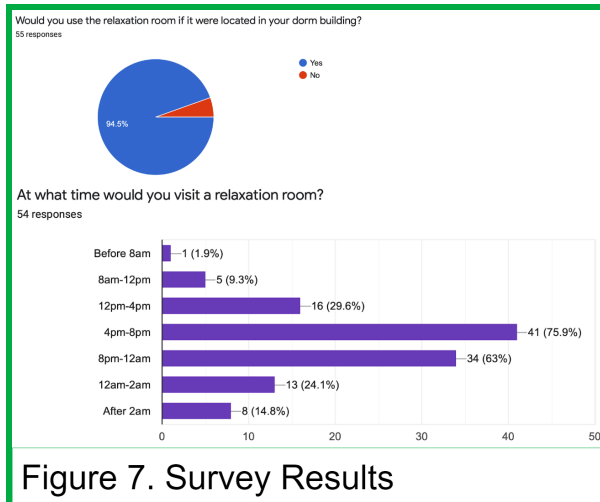


Figure 7. Survey Results

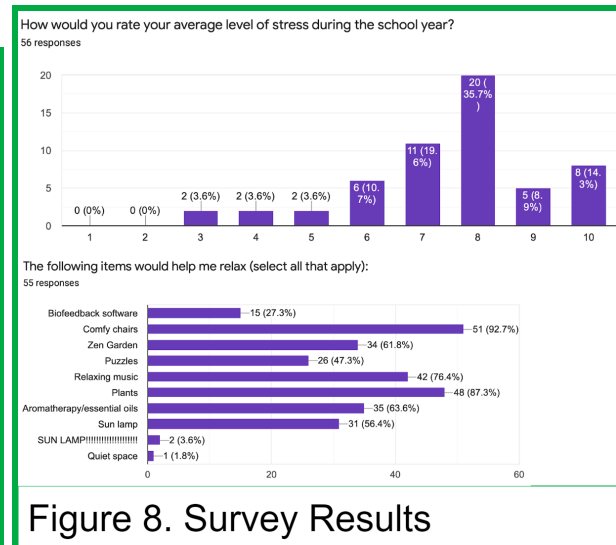


Figure 8. Survey Results

In Figure 7, results show that the vast majority of students would utilize a relaxation space, which confirms our assertions that additional health and wellness resources are an important part of campus life. Further, most students indicated that they would visit the relaxation room outside of business hours, which limits their ability to use the Relaxation Room in IM. Most students replied that the hours of 4:00pm-12:00am would be the time when they would utilize the space. It is appropriate to house the Stress Less Space in Simmons building since it is available to all Schreyer non-residence from 7 am to 10 pm everyday.

Figure 8 also shows that through students' own self diagnosis there is a need for students to have an outlet to relax. With the majority of students reporting above average stress levels, there is a need to have a location that will allow students to remove themselves from their hectic lives.

Management and Maintenance

The everyday maintenance of the Stress Less Space would have the same basic janitorial needs as the conference room has now. Therefore cleanliness and maintenance would not require significant changes to staffing. Any additional care for the room would be assigned to the offices that are in 100 Simmons Hall. Additional care might consist of watering the plants every couple of days or sharpening colored pencils for the coloring books. Use of resources would also create a need to inventory supplies like pencils and coloring books. These responsibilities would also be managed by the administrative staff.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Student and University Impact

Based on survey responses from Schreyer students, the Stress Less Space would be utilized most in the evenings with the highest responses coming from 4pm-12am. Even though swipe access is only available until 10pm the space would be used most in the evenings. Students will respond most to the environment that the room provides like the comfortable seating, plants, and calming music.

Using this space as a source of data collection to improve the resources that Penn State is able to provide to the honors students is primarily the goal of this plan. However, the focus on data collection and relationship to stress and mental health opens the window for research by graduate students and professors in a number of departments at Penn State, but most likely the Psychology and Biobehavioral Health departments. Using the resources that already exist as parts of these research departments, improvement to the space and administrative consciousness of the honors student experience could grow exponentially with an extension to the graduate schools and interested research professors.

In addition to being the first university to offer a relaxation space in a residence hall, published research also contributes to Penn State's reputation as a primary research institution. Dr. Linda LaSalle confirmed that students would not be intimidated or hesitant to participate in the research, or even to utilize the space as she is very involved with active research into student life on campus currently.

Administrative Opinion

Linda LaSalle, Director of Health Promotion and Wellness

Linda La Salle believes a relaxation room in Atherton would be a necessary addition to improve student wellness. She also indicated that the Office of Health Promotion and Wellness would be more than willing to work with Shreyer to start another Relaxation Room and host Wellness Wednesdays.

Tom Weber, Director of Information Technology for Schreyer Honors College

Tom thinks this plan is very attainable and doesn't believe the cost of the transition of the Stress Less Space to the conference room would be too great for the benefit that it would bring to the students.

Chi Nguyen, Data Analyst for Schreyer Honors College

Chi believes that the Schreyer Honors College will greatly benefit from the addition of a Schreyer Stress Less Space and collecting data on scholars will maximise its benefit to the honors college. She does not believe it difficult to easily benchmark the success of the room and its impact on scholars.

President Barron, President of The Pennsylvania State University

President Barron is excited about the space, and even proposed that we expand this service to Old Main so that administrators may take part in the effort to make mental health and wellness sustainable. He expressed that it is a relatively low-cost endeavor and seems very practical and useful. Although there are some parts of the room that are not entirely unique, he is enthusiastic about some unique parts of the room, specifically the possibility of including biofeedback software and other related stress-reduction software.

Rick Jacobs, Retired professor of Psychology at The Pennsylvania State University

Rick Jacobs was very excited about the possibility of the relaxation rooms in the honor's dorm buildings. He proposed that we expand the service to allow professors from other departments such as Psychology and Biobehavioral Health to conduct research on stress and mental health through the students who use the room. He expressed that the relaxation room opens up a variety of opportunities on campus outside of simply providing students with a space to relax.

TIMELINE & METRICS

Year One

- Build initial relaxation room, branded as “Schreyer Stress Less Space,” in Simmons room 100F (see Figures 4-5)
- Add a “Smiley Terminal” to both the current Relaxation Room in IM and the newly built Simmons room to gather feedback on student activity and opinion. Data will be collected during the final two weeks of each semester
- Post printed QR codes in the Schreyer Stress Less Space with an optional, but encouraged, survey for visiting scholars to provide input in greater detail for the room. Data will be collected throughout the first year of the operational space
 - Detailed survey draft: <https://forms.gle/MbBdc6rgJzFHjzR68>
- Add Biofeedback software to the Schreyer Stress Less Space, including a computer to evaluate the biofeedback in real-time
- Train nearby office staff to be proficient in managing the biofeedback software featured in the Schreyer Stress Less Space
- Apply swipe access to the Stress Less Space door for all Schreyer students to collect information about how often it is accessed and further determine popular hours of use

Year Two

- Perform close data analysis of feedback from Simmons using the data collected during the fall and spring semesters
- Collect and analyze inventory data to determine which activities/resources are most used
- Compare space accessibility to that of the Relaxation room in IM

Year Three

- Make changes to Simmons room based on feedback analysis
- Create new feedback collection methods based on popularity of existing methods
- Possible building of a second room in Atherton Hall if Simmons room is successful in accommodating a higher amount of people with positive feedback of the space

Year Four

- Begin collecting data from Atherton Hall room, if built, following the same data collection model for the Simmons room

- Continue data collection success in Simmons and monitor changes in student mood/behavior
- Allow for different college departments to begin to use the Stress Less Spaces for study and student engagement

Year Five

- Collect data from both rooms and reflect on success of the Schreyer Stress Less Space and see if there is potential to expand relaxation rooms into other dorms and spaces on campus

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