

# Helping Students **THRIVE** in the Digital Era

McGill University Case Study



# Introduction

McGill University is one of the leading universities in the world that attracts some of the best and brightest. Like many academic institutions, McGill realized how hard it is for some students to manage their digital lives, both in the classroom and beyond. As a result, they sought a way to help students navigate the pressures of life in the digital age so students could enjoy that sweet spot where they were both thriving and productive.

## The Problem

Since the shift to remote learning, in part caused by the pandemic, searches for “how to get your brain to focus” have increased 300 percent. 60% of students say they use digital technology more than they would like to, acknowledging a need to be “always on” their computer or mobile device. Others feel a decline in their mental health manifested in increased depression and an inability to focus for long periods of time, with 17% of students noting they “feel anxious” when away from digital devices, even for short periods of time. Universities wanted to act. However, they felt ill-equipped to address these issues without the research and pedagogy to improve the digital wellbeing of students in a meaningful way. McGill University was introduced to the Digital Wellness Institute through the online course creator PowerEd at Athabasca University, to bring about change.

## The Missing Component in the Student Wellbeing Story

For years, student wellbeing efforts have focused almost exclusively on mental and physical health, offering seminars and platforms to help students reduce stress while improving in the areas of exercise, sleep, and mental health. While these approaches are certainly important, academic institutions actually have a much deeper and often overlooked responsibility: Upskilling students to help them achieve digital wellness. According to the Digital Wellness Institute, digital wellness is defined as the “optimal state of health and wellbeing that a person using technology is capable of achieving.” Digital Wellness is no longer a luxury but an imperative skill set for a student’s academic performance and personal wellbeing in the digital era.

# Digital Wellness 101 as a Strategy

To address these issues and empower learners of all ages with the skills needed to thrive in the digital age, the Digital Wellness Institute partnered with PowerEd by Athabasca University and McGill University to create an interactive course to help students reclaim their overall sense of wellbeing and establish a healthier, more intentional relationship with digital technology.

The course, Digital Wellness 101, teaches students how intentional technology practices can be used to both prevent and recover from burnout and sensory overload. The course content is geared towards empowering students to shift their tech habits from those that result in fatigue to those which energize, enabling the achievement of optimal balance between productivity and self-care.

The course includes three short, self-directed units that allow students to walk through at their own pace, for a total of one to three hours of learning. The course is

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also SCORM-compliant and integratable with an institution’s existing learning management system. Students and faculty can also download a workbook, additional articles, and supplemental resources to engage with the content on a deeper level.

As technology is constantly evolving, student mental health and social skills are constantly challenged. The Digital Wellness 101 curriculum is designed to deliver concrete, evidence based strategies to promote positive mental health, productivity, and digital readiness.



# Creating a Culture of Digital Wellness at McGill and Beyond

After incorporating Digital Wellness 101 into their online programming, students at McGill's School of Continuing Education gained valuable skills on how to improve their digital usage habits. 52% of students stated productivity gains (i.e improving focus and flow in their work) as a direct result of digital wellness education. 40% found healthier technology usage habits that improved mental health, and 25% found digital communication habits to be improved.

## Extending the Learning

As an organization that has worked with several higher-education clients, the Digital Wellness Institute knows there is no one-size-fits-all approach to solving all digital challenges. While Digital Wellness 101 is a good introduction to finding the sweet spot between technology and positive habits, many schools may wish to extend students' learning by delving deeper into the eight dimensions of digital wellness. The Digital Wellness Institute also offers a series of 15 minute micro-learnings on all of the eight topics as well as a longer certification program for academic faculty wishing to become Certified Educators.

Wherever your academic institution is in its digital wellness journey, now is the time to empower students with the tools and resources to thrive in the digital age. Contact us today to schedule a demo and get a roadmap to address the lack of digital wellness on your campus and beyond.