

Headspace & Boston University



Headspace helps Boston University shift campus culture and prioritize well-being among its academically driven student body.

ABOUT

Boston University, a prestigious private research institution, is home to over 37,000 students from 140 countries spread across 17 schools and colleges, more than 300 programs of study, and three campuses. Founded to be academically rigorous and open to people of all backgrounds, BU is a vibrant part of Boston's competitive higher education landscape.

CHALLENGE

The student mental health crisis has been a major concern for higher ed institutions in recent years. A 2023 survey found that more than 60% of college students meet the criteria for at least one mental health problem — a nearly 50% increase since 2013.

In 2017, the team behind Boston University's Behavioral Medicine was seeing the impact of this data on the ground. Like many other university counseling centers, demand was soaring, with students struggling with the rigorous academic culture on top of the typical challenges of going to college: living independently for the first time, moving to a new city or country, and finding community and belonging.

"It's remarkable how gifted and competitive these students are," shared Carrie Landa, BU's Executive Director of Student Wellbeing. "We really started to think about: How can we help shift the culture at the university? What can we do to help engage people in supporting students' well-being?" she said.

"It's important for students to recognize that the university cares about them and how they feel. That ultimately leads to our primary goal of shifting our campus culture."

— Carrie Landa, Executive Director, Student Wellbeing

But finding a one-size-fits-all solution was challenging given BU's massive and diverse student body. They needed solutions that would meet the needs of undergrad and graduate students alike, align with the unique challenges of different academic programs, and be flexible enough to appeal to people coming from a variety of backgrounds and cultural contexts.

HEADSPACE APPROACH

Landa's team offered Headspace to the entire student population free of charge, with the support of a generous donor gift. With Headspace, certified meditation teachers offer courses to help students create healthy habits, reduce stress, and sleep more soundly with 3,000+ meditations, mindfulness exercises, sleep content, and focus tools. But from day one, the Student Wellbeing Team knew that simply having this offering wasn't good enough — they had to make sure students knew about it.

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— Pedro Falci, Managing
Director of Student Wellbeing

HEADSPACE RESULTS

91%

of BU students who join
Headspace return for more
content after their first use

“We’re in a busy city on a busy campus with so many schools and colleges, and Boston University offers so many resources to its students,” explained Kris Covarrubias, the Director of Strategy, Marketing, and Communications for Student Wellbeing. Any communication about resources and programming, she added, had a lot of competition in a crowded information environment.

With the help of focus groups and surveys, the team identified that students like resources that meet them where they are as well as the need to clearly articulate the benefits of utilizing these resources. In addition to introducing Headspace during orientation panels or at resource fairs, the Student Wellbeing team has found natural ways to integrate resources into their existing programming. For example, a workshop on reducing stress includes a Headspace-branded slide on the evidence-backed benefits of meditation and a QR code to sign up for the benefit. A semester-long course on “Wellbeing for Leaders” includes a module on music and holistic wellbeing using Headspace’s curated playlists and [YouTube series](#). Pop-up events during election season included resources from Headspace’s “Politics Without Panic” toolkit. “Headspace has been a great place to go when we’re looking to give students actionable steps that align with our curriculum,” shared Pedro Falci, Managing Director of Student Wellbeing.

The team also partners with other departments to encourage them to share Headspace. They’ve given professors language to mention resources on their syllabi and collaborated with Student Health Services to include a Headspace QR code as part of their “sleep kits”, which include herbal tea, an eye mask, and ear plugs.

The Student Wellbeing team appreciates that Headspace’s messaging focuses more on the evidence-based benefits of using its resources instead of flowery language about self-care — an important distinction when convincing students to get involved.

“There’s a lot of fluffy, feel-good content out there, but at a research institution, our community can see through this. We want to offer students resources that are evidence-based, which makes Headspace appealing.”

— Carrie Landa, Executive Director, Student Wellbeing

BU also appreciates Headspace’s dedication to tailoring resources for the student population. A majority of Headspace’s existing toolkits were workplace-focused and mapped to milestones that did not always align with the academic year. In collaboration with the Headspace Member Growth Team, the Boston University Student Wellbeing team provided strategic guidance and feedback to develop student-centric messaging and assets that align with their holistic well-being needs throughout the academic year.

“Having a strong relationship with our Headspace client executive made me feel comfortable saying that these materials could be tweaked slightly to be more relevant and impactful for our student audience,” said Covarrubias.

RESULTS

Implementing Headspace has undoubtedly expanded the reach and impact of the Student Wellbeing team on campus. “We’ve thought strategically about how we integrate Headspace into our programming, and how we can plug and play across different spaces, whether it’s the academic space or student affairs,” said Landa. “The number of students enrolled in Headspace has been up consistently since August, and the dialogue about well-being across campus has opened up. It’s happening even among our administration, which is really valuable.”

Headspace’s variety of resources, from meditations and mindfulness exercises to sleep content and focus tools, mean students can access the type of support they need whenever they need it.

Additionally, thanks to the collaborative relationship with the BU team, Headspace developed a targeted campaign to support students during a key moment for higher education partners — back-to-school season. This campaign now serves as a valuable resource for all higher education clients to foster well-being on campus during this critical time.