



The *Parr Centre for Thriving* was launched in August 2020 to fund innovative projects across campus that support student mental health and thriving.

Thank you for your generous gift to the *Parr Centre for Thriving*. Your support is enabling Western to engage students, faculty and staff to enhance our mental health supports for students to ensure personal and academic success and thriving.

In academic year 2020-2021, **five projects** were supported by the *Parr Centre for Thriving*. Each of these projects enhanced first-year undergraduate student mental health and well-being in a collaborative and innovative way.

**The projects supported included:**

- Cultivating a Strengths-based Campus
- Life Design Project
- CliftonStrengths: Train the Trainer
- Cultivating Thriving Educators
- Augmented Reality Biofeedback for Mental Thriving

**More fulsome descriptions of each project can be found on the following pages.**

The inaugural year of projects supported by the *Parr Centre for Thriving* was very successful. Students across campus learned more about their own individual strengths and how to apply those strengths and utilize them during times of stress to ensure their personal and academic success. Students also learned new skills to enable them to manage disappointment while creating more resiliency for the future. Faculty and staff learned how to support student thriving.

The partnerships created through these projects will ensure that students continue to benefit from these initiatives throughout their time at Western and into the future.

# Cultivating a Strengths-based Campus

CliftonStrengths® assessments are designed to help students understand and apply their strengths to be more confident learners and enrich their student experience.

## Parr Centre Support: \$110,000

With Parr Centre support, Student Experience has made the CliftonStrengths® assessment available to all students participating in the Community Connections Program. This program is an optional one-day intensive workshop, available on campus or virtually, to support first-year students. Facilitated by Western staff and student peers, the workshops are offered to incoming first-year students beginning in the summer and run throughout the academic year.

To ensure we reach as many students as possible, Student Experience has also worked with the peer-based Academic Support Program and first-year academic courses to integrate CliftonStrengths® assessments into their curriculum.

Funds from the Parr Centre also provided access for campus leaders to the CliftonStrengths® for Students Campus Champions course, a six-hour interactive virtual course hosted by Gallup to train leaders on the fundamentals of strengths-based education and to help them discover the connection between student strengths, engagement, and wellbeing.

## Status: Complete

- Between September 2020 and August 2021, 901 students participated in the CliftonStrengths® assessment. With Parr Centre support, we have the capacity to deliver the assessment to another 1700 students in the Fall 2021 semester, with a focus on incoming students.
- 575 students participated in Community Connections workshops.
- 35 campus partners completed the CliftonStrengths® Campus Champions course and we now have a waitlist for the next session.
- A strengths portal for students where we can add tailored content is now complete, and students can access it at <https://studentexperience.uwo.ca/strengths/>

More information about the Community Connections program is available on the Student Experience website at [https://www.uwo.ca/se/digital/incoming/community\\_connections.html](https://www.uwo.ca/se/digital/incoming/community_connections.html)

Also, a video of a CliftonStrengths® peer-facilitated session at Western is also available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPsX6JtV24>

Program Lead: Student Experience



# Life Design Project

The life design project helps students connect their education to careers using the Stanford Life Design framework.

## Parr Centre Support: \$40,000

Parr Centre funds allowed us to introduce the Life Design framework and activities through the development of a series of strategies for introducing Life Design principles into existing and new programs.

Created by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans at Stanford University, Life Design encourages the application of design thinking principles to career and life planning. The Life Design framework focuses on core mindsets (e.g. curiosity, bias to action, and radical collaboration) as tools that can help build a life that is meaningful, fulfilling, and uniquely ours. By thinking like a designer, reframing dysfunctional beliefs, and prototyping ideas, we can tackle the 'wicked problem' of vocational wayfinding.

Life design programming helps first-year students craft a more fulfilling university experience that encompasses academic interests, experiential learning, co-curricular activities, and volunteer/leadership experiences. It answers the questions: how do I discover everything Western has to offer, make good choices, and graduate feeling satisfied with my student experience?

Life design programming encourages first-year students to build flexibility into their degree planning, ensuring they are ready to adjust to unexpected changes, and can confidently pivot to support new interests as well as changes in the world of work. Understanding how design thinking concepts and tools can support their success in their undergraduate studies will provide a strong foundation upon which future career planning can occur in third and fourth year.

Here's what Western students who participated in this work had to say:

- *"I found the workshop helpful, especially since the content was presented in a way that made it easy for the participant to create a structured plan for their future."*
- *"I enjoyed the workshop because of how the Career Coach encouraged us to focus on passions and interests that may not necessarily be traditionally associated with our degree."*

Parr Centre funds helped to kick-start Life Design conversations at Western. Our ultimate goal is for all students to have the tools and support to build a meaningful life and career.

## Status: In progress

- Six Western staff completed formal Life Design facilitator training through Stanford University and are now working to embed strategies within Careers & Experience programming and beyond
- 500 graduating students and alumni participated in a four-part virtual Life Design Masterclass in May 2021
- To expand reach, four informational videos were designed and created to explain key Life Design principles in an accessible manner, [https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbZM4TW\\_GWGTcTh21vfGDDbrGCP7rcwhD](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbZM4TW_GWGTcTh21vfGDDbrGCP7rcwhD)
- Life Design was incorporated into the Thriving Foundations programming in summer 2022 when 675 students participated in Life Design workshops while attending our on-campus summer transition program, Community Connections
- The Career Education team facilitated 14 workshop/presentation sessions attended by approx. 380 students during the 2021-2022 academic year
- The Faculty of Engineering developed a Career Design workshop in 2021-2022 that was delivered to approx. 700 undergraduate students
- 45 students participated in the Build a Meaningful Life & Career Virtual Masterclass held over four sessions in March 2022

In addition, all students who enter the Careers & Experience office are greeted by a neon sign that reads "Design Your Life!" We encourage students to take a photo with the sign when they achieve career milestones, including job offers, internship approval, graduate school acceptance, etc.

Program Lead: Career Education, Student Experience



# CliftonStrengths: Train-the-Trainer

The Train-the-Trainer program teaches first-year students who aspire to take on leadership roles how to support their peers in discovering and leveraging their talents identified in their CliftonStrengths® assessment. The Train-the-Trainer program helps develop thriving and strengths-based peer champions at Western.

## **Parr Centre Support: \$40,000**

Parr Centre funds enabled 10 student ambassadors to design a Train-the-Trainer program, resulting in a 20-page facilitation guide on how to deliver a foundational session on CliftonStrengths to first-year students.

The 10 ambassadors developed skills in program review and design, facilitation strategies, communicating feedback, and leadership. In turn, the ambassadors were able to use the facilitation guide to train colleagues and other student leaders in Residence Life, including 50 Dons. This allowed us to scale CliftonStrengths programming to more students on campus, including to more than 2,000 first-year students.

Training the 10 ambassadors had a multiplier effect, as many first-year students began their journey at Western with the message that they have unique talents that when activated will help them thrive.

Our ability to reach this many students was the direct result of funds from the Parr Centre and our resulting ability to teach student leaders to deliver the content.

## **Status: In progress**

- Program launched for first-year students in July 2021
- Consultant was hired to support the development of the integrated learning train-the-trainer program for first-year students
- 10 first-year students were recruited as ambassadors/peer champions to support the development and delivery of the program
- Training manual complete in April 2021

Program Lead: Student Experience



# Cultivating Thriving Educators

Leaders across campus play an important role in the developing of thriving students. The Cultivating Thriving Educators program is a professional development series for staff and faculty who support the development of thriving students. The investment in the leaders themselves, connecting with peers across campus, also supports employee well-being from a place of strength.

## **Parr Centre Support: \$25,000**

The Parr Centre funding provided the opportunity to integrate research and practice across Western University and promote collaboration among a variety of campus partners. The funding allowed us to create learning spaces that helped our stakeholders to understand the vision of thriving and to gain knowledge and skills that will contribute to their overall success in reaching their fullest potential. With this foundational knowledge in place, thriving practices are meaningfully embedded into academic and co-curricular learning experiences to support students in optimizing their well-being and development. To this end, the Cultivating Thriving Educators series was created.

This learning experience was delivered through 10 workshops. Each workshop includes specific learning outcomes, engaging activities, and opportunities for educators to reflect on their own professional practice with colleagues. Led by content from leaders across Canada, the workshops provide an opportunity to

share literature and best practices across the field of student affairs, while internal leaders contextualize it to fit our campus culture and student population. The series also includes a book club, coffee and conversation events, as well as fireside chats to build a sense of community and support for faculty and staff.

### **Status: Pilot complete**

- 150 faculty and staff across 22 campus units participated in the 10 sessions
- 53% of participants (80 out of 150) joined the book club

Some staff reflections from the program are available at: <https://news.westernu.ca/2021/06/thriving-educators-cultivate-caring-campus-community/>

For more information about the series, please visit: <https://studentexperience.uwo.ca/thrivingpd/index.html>

**Based on the success of the pilot funded by the Parr Centre, Student Experience plans to continue the program as a regular offering.**

Program Lead: Student Experience



# Augmented Reality Biofeedback for Mental Thriving

Biofeedback-enabled approaches to meditation have proven immediate and long-term benefits for anxiety. This approach focuses primarily on acute short-term interventions that, over time, develop skills that can be applied routinely.

## Parr Centre Support: \$50,000

(An additional \$50,000 was provided by the Bell-Western 5G Research Centre)

In partnership with Bell, Western is the first university in Canada testing 5G capability using 3.5 GHz 5G spectrum in pre-commercial mode. It is the beginning of a \$2.7-million project to deploy 5G network infrastructure throughout the Western campus. The first 5G site on campus is designated for research now and by summer, a full network is expected to be available across campus.

Kevin Shoemaker, acting Associate Vice-President (Research) and Professor of Kinesiology, has created a new device that takes advantage of a platform with our London-based partner, EXAR Studios, that utilizes the speed, responsiveness, and the edge computing processing capabilities of the 5G network to develop an app designed to gauge and guide student mental wellness. The app uses biofeedback, such as a visual representation of the user's heartbeat, to help them learn mindfulness and relaxation skills such as deep breathing to manage anxiety and stress.

In our model, undergraduate and graduate students are engaged in the process of product development and testing. The visualization and gamification features are improved in real-time through the 5G network, making Western the only place in Canada where this device can be developed to its full potential.

Once rolled out for first-year Western students, the product could be accessible to other institutions or adapted for other susceptible groups. The device can be developed as a personal treatment model or as a research device.

## Status: In progress

- Beta-testable device was available in June 2021
- A small group of students (about 50) were chosen to pilot the device in September 2022. Data collection will be done and includes how the students like the device and whether it provides relief.
- The device will then be verified for data privacy etc. after which we will pursue ethics to begin the research phase.

## How to learn more about the prototype

The "device" includes an arm band and a student's mobile phone. The arm band detects the heart's rhythm and transmits this information to the phone. Our Augmented Reality Biofeedback (ARBF) app is downloaded to the phone. Once activated, the app detects the arm band and guides the user through the experience, encouraging the participant to focus on breathing while watching the augmented image. In this case, the image is butterflies flying around a tree. The number of butterflies increases and decreases in concert with the magnitude of the user's heart rate variability, that is, the variations in heart rate from one beat to the next: more variability is better. The participant learns how to modify the number of butterflies which has a calming effect and can be improved over time. Each experience lasts about three minutes. The effect of the experience on the user's mental state is the key outcome. Other data of the rapid changes in heart rate variability are available to the research team for offline analysis.

Watch the prototype demo video here:

<https://vimeo.com/613214544/9d11d5bd87>

Program Lead: Kevin Shoemaker, acting Associate Vice-President (Research) and Professor of Kinesiology



# Further Information about Parr Centre for Thriving Activities

The following articles have promoted the many accomplishments of the Parr Centre for Thriving since its inception. The projects funded during the 2020-2021 have had a lasting impact on students, faculty and staff at Western.

## **New Parr Centre for Thriving at Western bolsters proactive support for student mental health**

A \$9.2-million gift from Jeff and Shelley Parr has helped Western University launch a centre dedicated to student mental health and well-being.

<https://news.westernu.ca/2020/08/new-parr-centre-for-thriving/>

## **Bell-Western 5G network enabling solutions to real-world challenges**

Researchers test-drive super-speed connectivity through 8 innovative projects

<https://news.westernu.ca/2022/02/bell-western-5g-network-enabling-solutions-to-real-world-challenges/>

## **'Thriving Educators' cultivate caring campus community**

As Western's student affairs professionals learned how best to support students, they found support in each other.

<https://news.westernu.ca/2021/06/thriving-educators-cultivate-caring-campus-community/>

## **The Parr Centre for Thriving was also featured in the most recent issue of *Annual Impact*:**

<https://www.giving.westernu.ca/why-western/annual-impact/2022/our-strength-is-in-our.html>

