

## Health Aspects of Inclusion

This is a guideline for students that identifies inclusivity issues in academic environments and proposes action plans to tackle them. It complements INGENIUM guidelines and focuses on students' contributions.

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## Chapter 1 - Healthy Campus & Inclusive Classroom

This chapter is complementary to the INGENIUM for a Healthy Campus guide.

### Subchapter 1 - Healthy Campus Definition

A Healthy Campus is a higher education environment that holistically promotes and supports the physical, mental, emotional, social, and environmental wellbeing of all members of its community (students, staff, and surrounding society) by embedding health promotion into its culture, structures, policies, operations, academic mandates, and environments, in alignment with sustainability, equity, and inclusion principles<sup>1</sup>. There is an international framework *Okanagan Charter*<sup>2</sup>, which calls on universities to embed health into all aspects of campus life and to lead health promotion action locally and globally.

### Subchapter 2 - Problems Regarding Healthy Campus

1. Uneven policy development across countries: There are several guidelines on how to make campuses healthier and more inclusive classrooms, but there is no strict policy or regulation about applying them. The problem is that guidelines are not applied equally within every country and university. Some countries (including Romania) lack formal healthy campus frameworks.

2. Campus Design and Physical Environment - Addressed in: Section 3.3.4 (Environment) and 2.2 (Physical Activity Promotion)<sup>3</sup>

Although the guidelines recommend creating social, relaxation, and physical activity spaces, they lack detail on design standards and do not propose specific sensory, cultural, or accessibility elements that make spaces inclusive and emotionally supportive.

### Subchapter 3 - Definition of Inclusive Classrooms and Problems:

An inclusive classroom is a learning environment where all students regardless of ability, background, or identity are welcomed, supported, and given equal opportunities to participate and succeed. It goes beyond physical placement, involving changes in teaching, curriculum, and school

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<sup>1</sup> Lau, S. S. Y., Gou, Z., & Liu, Y. (2014). Healthy campus by open space design: Approaches and guidelines. *Frontiers of Architectural Research*, 3(4), 452-467.

<sup>2</sup> Black, T., & Stanton, A. (2016). Final report on the development of the Okanagan Charter: An international charter for health promoting universities & colleges

<sup>3</sup> INGENIUM Alliance. (2024). D9.4 INGENIUM for a Healthy Campus: Preliminary guidelines and recommendations

culture to ensure full participation and belonging<sup>4 5</sup>. In this document, there can be seen some examples related to how an inclusive learning environment should be <sup>6</sup>. However, students' opinions and effectiveness about these examples are absent from the document.

#### Subchapter 4 - Suggested Action Regarding Healthy Campus

1. Writing specific frameworks or regulations for every country and setting some goals that need to be achieved.
2. The problem regarding inclusive campus design could be improved by following the suggestions:
  - Implement Universal Design principles (inclusive design guidelines): quiet rooms, color-coded wayfinding, tactile signage, gender-neutral bathrooms, and step-free access must be standard across campuses.
  - Redesign indoor common areas with modular furniture, soft lighting, sound-dampening elements, plants, and access to natural light (biophilic design).
  - Convert underused outdoor areas into micro-retreats (chill zones): shaded seating, hammocks, outdoor art created by students, or community gardens where students can contribute.
  - Include “communal kitchens” or food-sharing spaces that encourage informal interactions and promote food security and social cohesion.

#### Subchapter 5 - Suggested Action Regarding Inclusive Classrooms:

Within students' opinions and efficiency that are connected to the examples, it could be a more effective tool for the members of the alliance. Furthermore, providing this tool with the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) that has been developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) codes could provide effective<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Anna Cecilia Rapp & Anabel Corral-Granados (2024) Understanding inclusive education – a theoretical contribution from system theory and the constructionist perspective, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 28:4, 423-439, DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2021.1946725

<sup>5</sup> Horne-Shuttleworth, M., Somma, M., Włodarczyk, K.A. (2024). Inclusive Education as a Concept, Construct, and Practice. In: *Teaching Inclusive Education through Life Story Inquiry*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-59983-5\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-59983-5_2)

<sup>6</sup> INGENIUM Alliance. (2024). D9.1 INGENIUM Action Plan for Equity and Inclusion.

<sup>7</sup> World Health Organization. (2019). International statistical classification of diseases and related health problems (11th ed.). <https://icd.who.int/>

## **Chapter 2 - Community Engagement**

This chapter is complementary to the INGENIUM Action Plan for Equity and for a Healthy Campus guides; therefore, it includes some improvement points on policies and action plans developed in that document.

### **Subchapter 1 - Problems Regarding the Community Engagement**

A supportive community is essential for the health of everyone that exists in it, which consists of both students and staff when we are referring to the academic environment. A hostile or non-inclusive environment can lead to health problems, and this is particularly true regarding mental health. Isolation from the community can lead to depression and anxiety, and it can be caused by a variety of situations,, like discrimination or bullying cases, or even insufficient social clubs where students can connect. Additionally, discrimination towards minorities often ends in physical violence, making the community unsafe.

### **Subchapter 2 - Suggested Action**

In section 2.1.5 in the INGENIUM guideline, health promotion initiatives are mentioned, such as providing free menstrual products on the university campus, and in section 3.3.5, student and staff initiatives are encouraged. These are very complete from the administration's point of view, but students could be more involved in the promotion of these projects. Student delegation groups could work on getting this information distributed through social media, blogs, or podcasts directed to students. It is important that student bodies take part in this because the administration does not always manage to get the information across in a way that students find engaging or to keep it updated. This way, an accessible way of distributing information is available to all students, and they will not miss out on any benefits that the university offers, allowing them to be connected with their community and lessen loneliness and isolation.

Additionally, students' mental wellbeing would benefit from clubs or support groups, especially if they are centered on wellness topics such as fitness challenges, stress management or mental health awareness. Having information about these topics is as important for students as meeting people with the same struggles. Both administration and student representatives should encourage the students' participation in social events and organisations, and again, the latter should ensure the information reaches the students in an accessible way them.

Students could also take a proactive approach towards their curriculum and participate in creating the content of wellness-related courses, as well as the student-led organisations mentioned earlier. This way they can ensure the topics relevant to them are addressed, such as mental health, balanced sleep, and nutrition, etc.

Mentoring programs are another student-organised initiative to be considered. It allows students to seek help from someone they can relate to, but who also has the experience and insight to provide support. Especially for minorities, this can be a way to feel included in the academic environment despite cultural differences.

Students who belong to a community prone to suffering discrimination, such as the LGBTQ+ or disabled communities, could create student support groups. This can ensure a safe and healthy environment to be themselves and integrate smoothly, therefore supporting their mental and emotional wellbeing.

## **Chapter 3 - Extracurricular Activities**

### **Subchapter 1 - Problems Regarding the Extracurricular Activities**

Extracurricular activities are defined as structured, school-affiliated, or externally organized activities that occur outside the formal academic curriculum and are not part of graded coursework. These activities are typically voluntary, non-credit-bearing, and include a wide range of pursuits such as sports, student government, cultural clubs, volunteering, and employment<sup>8</sup>.

Overall, the guidelines clearly define problems related to students with disabilities, such as participation, learning, and physical activities etc. In the 2.6. Suggested Actions<sup>6</sup> many actions can be taken according to this initiative, only a few parts are within the scope of extracurricular activities that students can involve in a meaningful way. However, students' role in the extracurricular activities might be increased according to the quality of higher education's principles<sup>9</sup>.

### **Subchapter 2 - Suggested Action Regarding the Extracurricular Activities**

Even though the guideline states "The university should encourage students, including students with disabilities, to participate in the different governing bodies, university representation entities, and student associations.", there should be direct support to student bodies to encourage these

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<sup>8</sup> Bartkus, K. R., Nemelka, B., Nemelka, M., & Gardner, P. (2012). Clarifying the Meaning of Extracurricular Activity: A Literature Review of Definitions. *American Journal of Business Education*, 5(6), 693-704.

<sup>9</sup> Coates, H. (2005). The value of student engagement for higher education quality assurance. *Quality in higher education*, 11(1), 25-36.

bodies to organize projects related to health and other matters. To support this kind of project, universities can create a fund that these bodies can apply for via application forms, then these forms can be assessed by certain measurement tools that will be developed by the alliance. Furthermore, outcomes of projects need to be checked regularly, and when they are finalized, outcomes of the project can be added to the pool or any digital tool. Eventually, it'll lead to having a database about this topic.

## **Chapter 4 - Monitoring**

### **Subchapter 1 - Problems Regarding Students' Involvement:**

Students' active participation in monitoring and evaluation processes within higher education institutions is widely recognized as crucial for improving academic quality, effectiveness, and inclusivity. However, this participation often remains superficial and symbolic, lacking the transformative impact it should have<sup>10</sup>. Notably, such meaningful student involvement is still absent in many current institutional guidelines and frameworks. Although students may be formally included in university governance structures, their input is frequently undervalued, constrained by hierarchical systems and limited opportunities for genuine engagement<sup>8</sup>. Participation is often reduced to procedural compliance rather than being treated as a valuable strategic contribution. Moreover, higher education institutions tend to lack structured and continuous methods for collecting and acting upon student feedback. In this context, the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle is identified as a promising tool to facilitate systematic student involvement and promote continuous improvement<sup>11</sup>. Overall, the absence of authentic engagement mechanisms and sustainable evaluation strategies limits the impact of student participation. Without deliberate action, the transformative potential of students in shaping institutional quality remains underutilized.

### **Subchapter 2 - Problems Regarding Implementation of ICF Method:**

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) is a framework by the World Health Organization (WHO) that describes health and disability in terms of body functions, activities, participation, and the influence of environmental and personal factors<sup>12</sup>. It focuses on

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<sup>10</sup> Shahabul, H., Muthanna, A., & Sultana, M. (2022). Student participation in university administration: factors, approaches and impact. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 28(1), 81-99.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel, S., & Farrer, H. (2025). Integrating the PDCA Cycle for Continuous Improvement and Academic Quality Enhancement in Higher Education. *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education*, 17(2), 115-124.

<sup>12</sup> World Health Organization. (2001). *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health: ICF*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

how people live with their health conditions, not just the conditions themselves. In the current literature, it's possible to see studies that implement ICF related to accessibility<sup>13 14</sup>. However, according to INGENIUM's guidelines, ICF is not implemented. The use of this method could help analyze qualitative data gathered from understanding students who require special care. In other words, these students' health conditions, difficulties that are seen in activities of daily living (ADL), and barriers to participation.

### Subchapter 3 - Suggested Action Regarding Students' Involvement

To enhance meaningful student participation in monitoring and evaluation processes, higher education institutions (HEIs) should integrate the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle systematically into their student feedback mechanisms. This structured approach will allow institutions to continuously gather student input, implement targeted improvements, evaluate outcomes, and refine institutional practices<sup>11</sup>.

Furthermore, it is crucial for universities to establish empowered student representative roles within monitoring committees, ensuring that student involvement extends beyond symbolic participation by providing clear responsibilities and genuine access to decision-making processes. These roles should be supported by training and institutional resources.

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<sup>13</sup> Bencini, G. M., Garofolo, I., & Arengi, A. (2018). Implementing universal design and the ICF in higher education: Towards a model that achieves quality higher education for all. In *Transforming our world through design, diversity and education* (pp. 464-472). IOS Press.

<sup>14</sup> Beyene, W. M., Mekonnen, A. T., & Giannoumis, G. A. (2023). Inclusion, access, and accessibility of educational resources in higher education institutions: exploring the Ethiopian context. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 27(1), 18-34.

Additionally, embedding student feedback directly into institutional policy and planning cycles will reinforce transparency and institutional accountability, making student voices visible and valued components of ongoing quality assurance processes. To facilitate continuous and inclusive engagement, institutions should leverage digital platforms, enabling students (particularly remote or underrepresented groups) to regularly contribute feedback and suggestions. Finally, fostering a culture of co-creation and shared responsibility is essential. Viewing students as active partners and co-creators within institutional improvement processes will promote deeper engagement and long-term student commitment to institutional quality and effectiveness.

#### Subchapter 4 - Suggested Action Regarding Implementation of ICF Method:

With the qualitative data gathered from students during interview sessions or workshops, the ICF method can be implemented by experts and students with experience in this area, from every member of the alliance.