



INTERSECTIONS

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Promoting Creative Expression, Reflection, And Well-Being Through an Arts-Based Activity for Students to Envision Futures Where “We Get It Right”

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TAKE HOME POINT – Arts-based activities, such as using collage to envision healthy futures where we “get it right”, allow students to creatively express their learning and support their well-being.

COMMENTARY

Arts-based educational approaches allow students to creatively express their ideas, explore real-world challenges, and enhance classroom communities (Parker & Perry, 2025). Robust research demonstrates that arts engagement facilitates well-being through reducing stress, promoting social connection, elevating underrepresented voices, and reducing stigma (Jensen & Bonde, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2024).

For a graduate-level course on mental health, we designed an activity inspired by the book, *What if we get it right? Visions of Climate Futures* (Johnson,

2024). The activity’s goals were to creatively express themes from the course and to support classroom well-being.

The instructor first introduced research showing how arts engagement promotes well-being. Then, we used paper, markers, colored pencils, glue, and magazines to create collages based on two questions: *What if we get it right with mental health? What would that future look like?*

Afterwards, everyone wrote a few sentences about their artwork, what it meant to them, and/or how it connected to the course themes. Fourteen students, the Teaching Assistant, and the instructor

While this activity was tailored to a graduate-level public health course, it could be easily adapted to other health sciences topics. Future evaluations with more robust data collection could provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of arts-based activities in health professions education.



Figure 1: Collage of student work representing "What if we get it right with mental health"

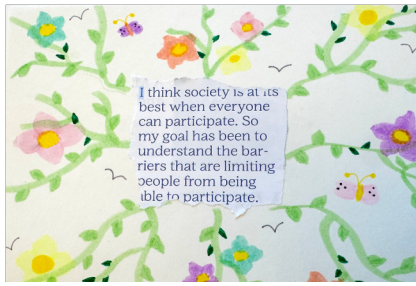


Figure 2: Kate Franco - My piece is about allowing people to bloom and dismantling the barriers that prevent them from doing so. In an ideal world, everyone would be allowed to be happy and be themselves without any holding back. Everyone deserves to be happy and fulfilled. Dismantling these barriers is the first step to a beautiful and productive and meaningful life.

Figure 3: Olachi Unaka - My art piece reflects healing and looking towards a brighter future. It includes statements of affirmation and a depiction of brain health.

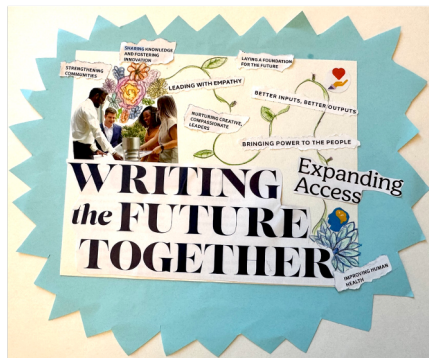


Figure 4: Kayla Means - My piece represents the beauty and growth that occurs when we engage with community in a meaningful, collaborative, supportive, empathetic, and empowering way. A perfect future for mental health would be a world in which everyone feels some sense of responsibility for the well-being of others and where everyone feels free and supported enough to express their vulnerabilities and get the help they need. The floral element represents the beauty in society blooming toward this hope.

Figure 5: Ami Syed - This artwork represents how I believe "if we get mental health right," the world would be more of a whimsical collective. People would be harmonious with one another, curious, whimsical, and willing to help. I decided to make it whimsical because reconnecting with the whimsical side of myself helped me regain myself after falling into depression. The world needs more whimsy after all.

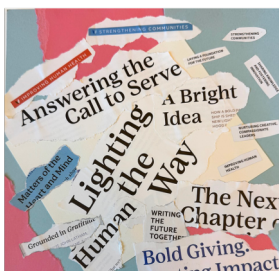
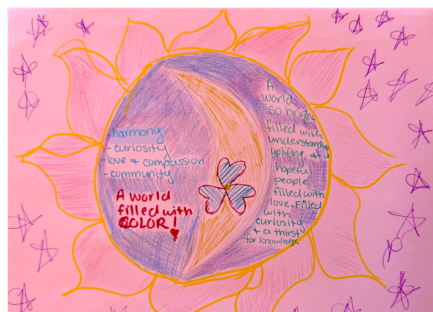


Figure 6: Rubi Gomez - When I think of a better future, I don't see images, per say, but words come to mind. This is what my art depicts. Powerful, positive words that make the reader/viewer feel good. Nothing in the art piece is perfect, and that's on purpose. I don't think the future and mental health will be absolutely perfect and I needed others to see that. Words and labels hold power and that is the strongest theme I think of when thinking of mental health.

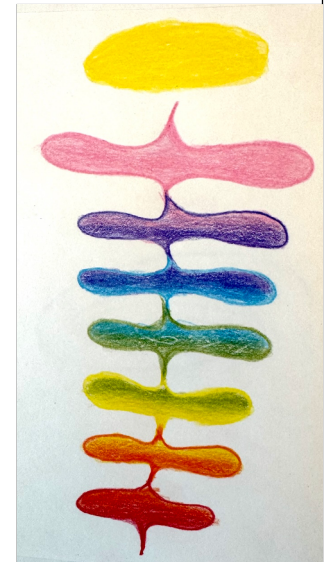


Figure 7: Jess Kubert - My piece is called 'Alignment.' I believe in a future where we get mental health right is one where we exist in harmony, balance, and truth between our inner and outer worlds. It does not mean we are happy-go-lucky all the time. The highest vibrational frequency you can feel is Authenticity. This radiates out to everyone and everything you come into contact with. Good mental health isn't about striving for perfection, innocence or joy. Those feelings are part of it, but being in alignment with your values and having the truth of your experiences—good and bad—is the future we all deserve.

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