

## **SDG 3 - UST's Commitment to Good Health and Wellness**

The University of Santo Tomas (UST), guided by its mission to form competent and compassionate persons committed to serve the Church, the nation, and the global community, has consistently aligned its initiatives to support the well-being of its stakeholders. This narrative report highlights UST's concerted efforts to advance Good Health and Well-Being, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal - SDG 3. The university's initiatives, as outlined by the leadership of Fr. Richard G. Ang, O.P., and supported by various academic and administrative units, emphasize the holistic development of students, faculty, and staff, ensuring their spiritual, mental, physical, and social well-being.

The concept of health and well-being at UST extends beyond mere physical wellness; it encompasses mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health. The university continuously champion this concept through a dynamic array of initiatives that address the physical, mental, and social health of its community and beyond. By fostering innovation, community service, and advocacy, UST strengthens its commitment to creating a healthier and more inclusive society.

### **1. Promotion of Mental and Psychological Wellness**

During the pandemic, UST faced the challenge of supporting the mental and emotional well-being of its community amidst the shift to remote learning and the uncertainty surrounding the health crisis. Fr. Ang, in his 7 Point Agenda for Thomasian Education 4.0, highlighted the importance of fostering mental wellness alongside academic excellence.

- 1.1. Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): UST's CAPS office has provided essential support through online counseling services, offering a safe space for students, faculty, and staff to discuss mental health issues, stress, and anxiety. With mental health awareness becoming more vital, UST continues to provide psychological first-aid and regular webinars focused on coping with stress, dealing with depression, and fostering resilience.
- 1.2. Student Well-being Programs: UST has also introduced programs designed to support the psychological needs of students through initiatives such as peer support groups, stress management workshops, and access to self-help resources. These initiatives encourage students to speak openly about their mental health challenges, breaking down stigmas and promoting a culture of self-care and support within the community.
- 1.3. Faculty Wellness Programs: Understanding that faculty members also experience stress and burnout, UST has organized wellness programs for educators, which include mindfulness sessions and stress-relief activities. These initiatives are aimed at enhancing the overall productivity and well-being of the university's teaching staff, ensuring that they remain capable of delivering quality education while maintaining their own health.

- 1.4. [Mental Health Walk 2024](#): To combat mental health stigma, the UST Psychology Department and Psychology Society organized the Mental Health Walk 2024, a community-driven activity that combines physical wellness with mental health advocacy. This initiative underscores the holistic nature of well-being and the importance of safe spaces for mental health discussions.
- 1.5. [Bridging Art to Mental Health](#): Recognizing the therapeutic potential of the arts, the program Bridging Art to Mental Health integrates creativity into mental wellness advocacy. By using art as a medium for emotional expression and healing, this initiative offers innovative ways to address the psychological impact of the pandemic.

## 2. Physical Health and Fitness

The physical health of the Thomasian community has always been a priority for UST, as it is integral to academic success and overall well-being. Fr. Ang's commitment to wellness has translated into **\*\*continuous investments in physical health programs and infrastructure\*\***.

- 2.1. UST Health Services: The UST Health Service Center continues to provide health services to students and employees, including regular medical check-ups, vaccination drives, and health screenings. During the pandemic, the center transitioned to providing telemedicine services, ensuring that community members continued to receive timely medical advice and care.
- 2.2. Fitness Programs: UST promotes fitness through its physical education curriculum offering a range of sports and fitness activities to students. The university also holds wellness activities such as Zumba sessions, fun runs, and fitness challenges. In addition, the UST Gym and Sports Facilities remain a key resource for students and staff, promoting an active lifestyle.
- 2.3. Response to the Pandemic: In response to the challenges posed by COVID-19, UST has implemented strict health protocols on campus, including the regular disinfection of facilities, provision of sanitization stations, and the implementation of contact tracing and health monitoring systems. These measures have helped ensure the physical safety of students, faculty, and staff when engaging in in-person activities.

## 3. Spiritual Wellness

As a Catholic institution, UST places a strong emphasis on spiritual health, which is integral to the holistic well-being of its community. Spiritual wellness at UST is deeply connected to the Dominican tradition, which calls for a commitment to faith, service, and community.

- 3.1. Daily Mass and Spiritual Activities: UST provides opportunities for the Thomasian community to engage in daily Mass, prayer, and reflections. The Santísimo Rosario Parish on campus is a spiritual hub for students, faculty, and staff to nurture their faith through regular worship services and spiritual talks. Fr. Ang has

consistently emphasized that a strong spiritual foundation is essential for personal growth and resilience in times of adversity.

- 3.2. **Retreats and Formation Programs:** As part of Thomasian Education 4.0, UST has also introduced spiritual formation programs designed to help students deepen their faith, especially as they navigate the challenges of modern life. These programs include silent retreats, faith formation workshops, and other spiritual activities that encourage reflection and personal growth.

#### **4. Health Advocacy and Community Engagement**

UST also extends its commitment to health and wellness beyond its campus, engaging in community development and advocacy efforts that promote well-being among the local and global communities.

- 4.1. [Community Health and Outreach](#): As part of its social responsibility, UST has initiated several health advocacy programs, such as medical missions, blood donation drives, and health education campaigns. The university has collaborated with local health organizations to provide medical services and educational outreach to underserved communities.
- 4.2. [Support for Marginalized Groups](#): In alignment with the Thomasian Graduate Attribute of Servant Leadership UST has focused on supporting marginalized groups by providing health education, offering free medical consultations, and distributing health kits. The university also engages in environmental advocacy, linking wellness to environmental health through sustainable practices and campaigns.
- 4.3. **TOMASInno Center Initiatives:** UST's innovation hub, the TOMASInno Center, nurtures startups that align with health and well-being goals. During the Philippine Startup Week, Thomasian founders shared transformative solutions addressing societal needs, from health-related applications to educational tools. Additionally, the Accenture Seed Fund Demo Day showcased innovative technologies developed by UST's incubatees, demonstrating the university's commitment to integrating technology into health and well-being strategies.
- 4.4. [RAConsulta](#): **Tackling Women's Health and Well-Being:** UST took an active stance in addressing gender disparities in healthcare through **\*\*RAConsulta\*\***, a comprehensive initiative promoting women's health education and services. The program emphasizes the need for reproductive health awareness, maternal care, and early detection of diseases like breast cancer. By empowering women with knowledge and access, RAConsulta aligns with global efforts to reduce inequalities in healthcare.
- 4.5. [Empowering Communities Through Education](#): **Occupational Therapy Community-Based Rehabilitation -** UST's occupational therapy fieldwork extends its impact through community engagement, focusing on families of children with disabilities. By developing tailored educational materials, the program equips parents with strategies to manage disabilities and access support systems. This initiative fosters inclusion and collective well-being within local communities.

4.6. The partnership between the Starkey Hearing Foundation (SHF) and the Thomasian community exemplifies the essence of SDG) 3: Through its missions in the Philippines, SHF addresses a critical aspect of health equity by providing hearing aids and improving access to hearing healthcare, particularly for underserved populations. By restoring hearing, the foundation enhances individuals' quality of life, fosters inclusive communication, and empowers communities to thrive socially and economically. This initiative also demonstrates the importance of collaborative efforts among nonprofits, academic institutions, and local leaders in advancing universal health coverage and ensuring that no one is left behind in the pursuit of well-being.

## 5. Building a Culture of Wellness

Fr. Ang's vision of well-being as a key pillar of university life has led to a culture shift at UST, where wellness is not just an isolated initiative but a shared commitment across departments, programs, and activities.

5.1. Collaboration Across Disciplines: UST has worked to create a more interdisciplinary approach to wellness, where academic units, student organizations, and health services collaborate on health and wellness programs. For example, the integration of wellness into curriculum delivery and research, with initiatives addressing public health, mental health, and sustainable practices, enhances the overall effectiveness of UST's wellness efforts.

5.2. Resource Management and Expansion for Well-being: The expansion of UST campuses, such as the UST-Dr. Tony Tan Caktiong Innovation Center in Santa Rosa, is an example of how the university incorporates wellness into its infrastructure. These campuses are designed not only for academic growth but also to provide holistic environments that support the physical and mental well-being of students, faculty, and staff.

5.3. [Creative Advocacy for Holistic Well-Being - Verses for Voices](#): Poetry for Wellness - Verses for Voices utilizes poetry as a platform to advocate for holistic well-being, encouraging students to reflect on their physical, emotional, and mental health. This creative approach not only cultivates resilience but also promotes a supportive and empathetic university culture.