

KEEPING STRESS FROM EVOLVING INTO DISTRESS: Managing Student Stress Through Course Design

Reducing Distress in the Classroom



When there is an imminent threat of harm of a life-endangering situation, take immediate action to ensure the safety of the student and others. **Call University Police at 716-673-3333.**

In non-life threatening situations, special attention to issues of course design has the potential to reduce

unhealthy levels of stress. Some options that are available to course instructors are listed below:

Syllabus Construction Assignments

- Stagger due dates for course assignments
- Include low stake assignments that help identify students who may need additional instruction early in the semester
- For course-long assignments, incorporate periodic “check-ins” during office hours or schedule regular classroom sessions to meet with students one-on-one
- Allow students to have one “do over” that provides students with an opportunity to either correct missed test questions or resubmit a revised paper draft for partial credit
- Provide a clearly written explanation of your late assignment and extension policies

Assessment

- Describe and/or model “unsatisfactory”, “sufficient” and “satisfactory” classroom participation for students
- Incorporate multiple methods of assessing student participation in courses where it is a component of students’ final grade (e.g. completing a worksheet of main concepts, themes, etc. and turning in for a grade)

Grading

- Provide students with a grading rubric prior to giving assignments or at the beginning of the semester (View sample rubrics from the [Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education](#))
- Provide grade and feedback for assignments before the next assignment is due
- Incorporate language about the importance of learning from failure and disappointment in the course syllabus and one-on-one conversations
- Post exam answer keys so that students can learn from their mistakes

Campus Resources

- Include links to on-campus and/or online resources that educate students about how to study, write, prepare citations, etc.
- Alert students to other resources on campus that can aid in stress management

Course Management

- Allow students to select which date(s) they will take on a leadership role in class (i.e. leading discussion, presenting their work, etc.)
- Consult with other faculty members in your department about due dates and assignments they have implemented on a regular basis
- Ask students to communicate days/weeks that are especially packed with assignments in their other classes at the beginning of the semester



Communication Policy

- Clearly articulate communication practices and preferences (i.e. email response policy, etc.)

In-Class Meetings

- Interact with students with an awareness of the effect of one's body language (i.e. frowning, smiling, etc.) on student behavior and performance
- Use affirming language when students provide correct answers, but more importantly, when they make an effort to contribute in class
- Incorporate ongoing [mindfulness practices](#) that provide students with tools to cope with anxiety and stress in the moment

Teaching about Learning

- Schedule periodic workshops that impart skills and information needed to successfully demonstrate learning (i.e. how to construct a thesis statement, how to structure an analytical essay, etc.)
- Post templates of model work on assignments in conjunction with providing students with feedback on their submitted work

National Resources

Anxiety and Depression Association of America promotes the prevention, treatment, and cure of anxiety, depression, OCD, PTSD and related disorders and works to improve the lives of those who suffer from these diseases through education, practice and research. adaa.org/about-adaa/mission-history.

American College Health Association champions the health of college students and campus communities through advocacy, education and research. acha.org