

The Essential Balance

It has become common today to dismiss the importance of mental health in academic performance, as can be seen in many college student's lives. Students are faced with this academic pressure to flourish academically and are unable to maintain an equilibrium among their school work and mental health. The result of this action is seen as a potential internal threat by psychiatrists and psychologists. As a result of this mismanagement, students become overloaded with obligations and are unable to mentally cope thereby having an interference in academic achievement. Many psychiatrists have emphasized this link between academic success and the wellness of mental health and found that when a student does not prioritize the welfare of their mental health the worst they perform academically. Hence, I contend that a student's mental health is as important as their academics, therefore, students should balance the two responsibilities equally in order to be successful in college.

Despite developing technology, medicine, and prevalent awareness for mental wellness, mental illnesses such as anxiety disorder and depression are still under or not treated in young adults. Approximately 11.9% of college students are facing anxiety disorders and 7-9% having depression.¹ With these common illnesses and others leading to damaging effects on a student's perspective on life and themselves, as a society, there must be more awareness on the issue. If not, self-help actions could be taken by students. These may include but are not limited to dropping out, substance-use, or suicide.

Many young adults do not utilize counseling services provided by universities due to a worry of shame and embarrassment. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness

¹ Blanco C, et al. Mental health of college students and their non-college-attending peers: Results from the National Epidemiologic Study on Alcohol and Related Conditions. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2008;65(12):1429–37.

(NAMI), that brings hundreds of mental health organizations and volunteers to promote a healthier living through the treatment of the mental state for Americans, “More than 45 percent of young adults who stopped attending college because of mental health-related reasons did not request accommodations. (14) 50 percent of them did not access mental health services and supports either. (15)” This is big issues for all students including those who come to American colleges from other countries. Not utilizing or seeking help is a big issue that needs to be solved in order to improve the academics of thousands of students.

If there is nothing done for students who do not utilize counseling services due to embarrassment there will be a continuum of stigma around mental health. According to the National Alliance of Mental Health, “Sixty-four percent of students who experience mental health problems in college and withdraw from school do so because of their mental health issues” (NAMI, 2012). This was conducted in a survey that gathered 765 students who were diagnosed and living with mental illness. Of the total, 383 students did not access help for their mental illness. Of those students, 77 were no longer enrolled in college. Of those dropouts, 64% said they had to unenroll based on mental health reasons.²

If universities emphasize this importance in balancing mental health and academics then the campus would be praised for their care for students. Reputation plays a big part in college ranking. For example, if a university has a good reputation they can increase the amount tuition that students have to pay. Students are then willing to pay this amount of tuition in order to enroll in the specific college. This praise for mental awareness is a big step for universities in terms of economic and social increase. However, universities would have to make bigger steps to fully make the decision to raise tuition.

² Gruttadaro, Darcy, and Dana Crudo. College Students Speak: A Survey Report on Mental Health. National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2012, pp. 1–24, College Students Speak: A Survey Report on Mental Health.

If there is nothing done to help students with mental illnesses such as depression there will be an increase in dropouts that could lead to economic decreases in the university's salary. Student dropouts who do not continue their education are then not paying tuition that school year or further. Universities are then left shorthanded because they depended on a general amount of money given to them a school year based on the enrollment but now that there are unexpected unenrolling students that general amount has decreased because the students are not paying for another semester. This is an economic crisis for the college and if there is nothing to be done for students with mental illnesses colleges will continue to see significant drops in payment per school year.

A solution to this economic crisis, universities could be to bring more awareness to the importance of mental health in academic success but also everyday living. Bringing more awareness could include mandatory sessions about how to find help during a moment of anxiety or stress. These sessions could be inputted in orientation presentations. For instance, the University of Illinois at Chicago has about 4 hours long worth of discussions every day during the two-day orientation period. They include topics of health insurance, housing, and sexual assault so if they can add at least a 30-minute discussion about taking care of mental health and finding the resources on campus then all the first-year students would be better equipped in understanding mental and school work. This would inevitably increase mentality health and lower the dropout rate thereby stabilizing the general salary to the university.

On the contrary, some staff, faculties, and students would say that including a 30-minute session during universities orientation about the importance of mental health and how to maintain balance is not enough to decrease the number of students with mental illnesses such as depression. Statistically speaking about " 85% of college students reported feeling overwhelmed

by everything they had to do at some point within the past year” and 30% of students reported that the stress resulting from the overwhelming amount of things to do had negatively affected their academic performance.³ The problem in maintaining mental health wellness is not caused when a student is not informed on how the importance of mental health it is due to the academic pressure and stress that comes out of college. So, the solution would be to allow professors to limit and be aware of the work they give students.

However, this problem of stress and its solution defends the purpose of college. College allows a person to understand how to maintain balance in such an overwhelming and work-demanding society. So, if professors limit the work given to students the students will continue to work less and put less effort into work in the future such as when they are in a career.

Conversely, if 30-minute mental health info sessions during university orientations are included then colleges are fulfilling their purposes of making young adults into well-equipped adults who know how to take care of their work, social, and mental life. This is also bringing awareness to students who do not have to face such internal challenges such as depression or anxiety that may disrupt a students’ academic potential.

Another effect of a bad mental health could be a lack of concentration. For instance, having multiple essays or projects due plus having finals in one week could overload a student as far as having to stay up the entire night to finish studying that they could not sleep therefore interfering with their concentration during an exam. This is all disrupts their sleeping cycle and could go as far as resulting from insomnia. According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), an organization set to find cures and treatment for heart, lung, and sleep

³ Mental Health and College Students. Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2015, Mental Health and College Students.

disorders,⁴ “Studies also show that sleep deficiency alters activity in some parts of the brain. If you're sleep deficient, you may have trouble making decisions, solving problems, controlling your emotions and behavior, and coping with change.” They also assert that “sleep deficiency also has been linked to depression, suicide, and risk-taking behavior.”⁵ If a student sets a standard to put their mental health as high as they put their academics there would be less interference in concentration and academic attainment.

Transitioning from high school to college is one of the many struggles a first-year student may face. This transition involves a difference in environment, schoolwork, and friends. Being exposed to a new surrounding is hard to adapt to especially if you do not have any friends or family to help you with your transition. Many students who enter college are eighteen and are therefore considered “adults.” They are now expected to handle things on their own. This is a challenge that generation and generations of students will have to learn to overcome. They will have to learn to adapt to a new environment, denser coursework, and learn to make new friends. While these challenges may sound easy it is a struggle for many students which can lead to damaging effects on mental health.

In terms of a new environment, most first-year students move from a 3-4 floor building with under 4,000 students to a widespread campus with multiple infrastructures and more than 10,000 students. It may be frightening to students who come from a close-knit high school and can be somewhat of a culture shock to those students who may come to college internationally.

Furthermore, international students stand as a prime example of students in general who face mental health issues. In a study consisting of 203 international students from China, 47.5%

4 “About the NHLBI.” National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, www.nhlbi.nih.gov/about.

5 “Sleep Deprivation and Deficiency.” National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/sleep-deprivation-and-deficiency.

of them experienced symptoms of depression such as prolonged periods of sadness and 48% for anxiety disorders (Cheung 2011). This sample size is a good representation for the thousands of international students transitioning from their homeland to the United States because they are facing similar struggles such as living away from family and adapting to a whole new country. International students are at a huge risk for mental instability. In America, we are exposed to mental awareness from tv shows, movies, and social media. International students may not live in a country that values mental health. For example, in a [YouTube video](#) explaining the differences among American students from South Korean students, they emphasized that the U.S education system is based on making students find their “unique” passions and self. While in Korea, students are made to work hard and get good grades, solely basing themselves on academics rather than finding who they are and what they want to do in the future. South Korean are pressured to be academically successful by parents, cultural expectations, self, or all of these factors. This can lead to damaging effects on mental health and their academics.

One counterargument to stating that mental instability in international students or students, in general, can lead to failing grades is that even though a student may be mentally unstable that does not mean that will fail academically. In a video summarizing a case between Rice university student, Matthew Lim, and his battle between depression and stress, he discusses his struggle in pursuing his college education and dealing with mental illness. Lim had been dealing with depression and stress since high school and was pass the limit during his fall semester during finals. Although Lim was facing this instability and stress, he still managed to be socially involved such as being in marathons and having exceptional academics that lead him to be accepted in Rice University, a private research college with an acceptance rate under 20%.

This could be used as evidence that just because a student may not put an equal standard among mental health and academics does not mean they will fail academically.

Young adults who enroll in university with no prior knowledge on the importance of balancing school, social and work factors are faced with the struggle of mental instability. First-year students are easy targets in the struggle of maintaining balance in school, work, and social factors. Other students, while understanding the balance, maybe already too buried in school work and additional responsibilities that they are faced to ignore their mental health in order to thrive academically. So, it is up the university to stay up to date on how to inform students to manage all factors in their daily lives. Solutions could include 30-minute info sessions about the importance of mental wellness and its effects on academic achievement or could go as little as sending out emails to students about counseling services and how to sign up.

In conclusion, there should be a priority set by universities and students to learn to manage mental welfare and academics on an equal basis. Choosing to set aside mental health is easy and is done by millions of young adults but there needs to be an improvement in mental awareness. If students do not seek help for mental illness or stress then it could disrupt not only their tests, but their grades, attendance, and inevitably their life.

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