

The Pursuit of a Healthy Work-life Balance in Academia

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Introduction (5 -10 min)

“There is a mental health crisis in graduate education, and research institutions need to take action to address it”

Problem: Current mental health crisis in graduate research programs (Evans 2018)

Work-family conflict, job demands, leadership style, and perceived lack of control are the main predictors of psychological distress in graduate students.

Graduate students are six times more likely to experience depression or anxiety compared to the general population.

Pre-assessment

Briefly go over how participants feel about their work life balance, and what tools they use before going into module materials.

A recent survey of ~2,300 graduate students

From Evans et al. 2018, we see that a majority of graduate students believe they have an unhealthy work life balance, which correlates to a significant proportion of individuals having issues with anxiety and depression, particularly among female students.

Undergraduates

Mental health concerns all levels of academia. With a majority of undergraduate students, the change of setting from their parent’s home to college is a stark and often painful transition that manifests as stress.

Why is mental health important?

Large research teams suffer if one or more members suffer from mental health issues. Since graduate students’ work represents a huge proportion of the output of institutions, it’s concerning that the dropout rate is so high due to mental health issues.

Cultural Issue

Science and academia is inherently antagonistic, and therein lies an inherent of expectations and standards that are subjective and difficult to fulfil.

Solutions:

Individual- Mentors need to allow mentees to feel comfortable speaking up about potential issues they are having.

Institutional- By spreading awareness of mental health issues, we can normalize conversations regarding mental health to help remove the stigma that surrounds mental health issues in the US.

Objectives:

Tools and Strategies

Time Management

Expressive Writing

Mindfulness

Communication and Support

Time Study

By logging how you spend your time you may address any problem areas you see, so that you can work towards building a healthier schedule.

Filling in small segments of time between classes with short term goals can help you increase your productivity and gain momentum towards larger goal.

Journaling and Expressive writing

Studies have shown that techniques such as keeping a wellness journal, and writing towards self-positivity can have a significant effect on improving one's outlook during stressful periods. Such techniques also aid with self-expression, so that you may more effectively communicate if something is upsetting you and why.

CSU Health Network

CSU health network collaborator. Provide an overview of the types of services available for undergraduate, graduate and faculty at CSU. With an additional explanation of mindfulness and how self-reflection and presence of mind is beneficial.

Starting the Conversation

Talking about mental health can be uncomfortable, and studies have shown how a perceived stigma regarding mental health can prevent people from seeking care when they need it.

Mentors can play a critical role in helping mentees by scheduling a specific meeting to talk about mental health and normalizing conversations so that students who are struggling are able to express themselves and ask for guidance.

Objectives

Self-Reflection & Discussion

Starting the Conversation

Discussion: Start the conversation

In small groups. Begin a conversation about mental health with the right sort of questions to help foster an honest conversation.

Exercise: one on one conversation

Stimulate a conversation about time management to help recall some of the tools discussed in today's module.

“There is a mental health crisis in graduate education, and research institutions need to take action to address it.”

This module is designed to stimulate a more mindful engagement with your time, work-life balance, and how you communicate. While the research regarding mental health is staggering, it important to recognize that these issues exist and how we should support each other through what we all feel passionate about. Science!