Mental Health
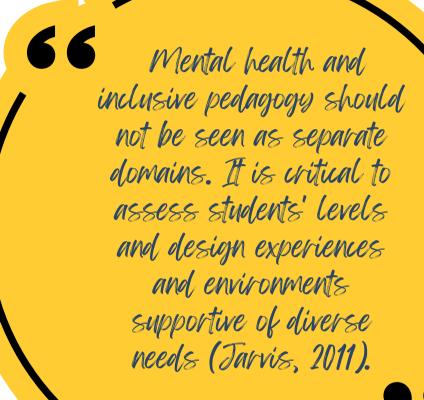
Pedagogical Suggestions, Resources and Practices to Support Students' Mental Health

Expectations & Policies

Learning Design Team

Concept

"Mental health and inclusive pedagogy should not be seen as separate domains. It is critical to assess students' levels and design experiences and environments supportive of diverse needs (Jarvis, 2011).

Expectations & Policies

Extensions, Expectations & Flexibility. *"To treat all students fairly, one must treat like cases alike. Individual policy exceptions increase the likelihood that implicit bias will taint decisions. But strict adherence to (strict) policies will likely differentially negatively impact the most vulnerable of one's students"* (Collier et al., 2021, p. 9).

Strategies and Suggestions

An inclusive educator is flexible. In turbulent times, be flexible. Inevitably, life has changed during the pandemic and many have been negatively impacted by COVID-19. The impact may be visible and invisible. Learners and/or their families may have lost employment and family members, and faced and/or are facing social isolation that may have led to mental health challenges. With new COVID variants, the impact of the pandemic on learners is ongoing, and its lasting impacts may be seen for years to come. Even the most committed and responsible learner may struggle in silence. All learners, particularly learners from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, may be experiencing even more challenges than before the pandemic.

Flexible policies. Goldman and Eiduson (2021) recommend the adoption of "flexible policies around GRADED "attendance" and "participation." According to the authors, "This flexibility can reduce the likelihood of "identity threat" and can promote inclusivity among all learners. Consider modifying policies that require medical notes to "excuse" occasional absences,* reduce learners' grades for tardiness, and define "class participation" too narrowly. These adjustments in protocol can mitigate against the appearance of classism, lessen the anxiety of those who have chronic physical or mental conditions, and reduce marginalization among learners who have difficulty accessing health care services or are dependent on others for transportation" (Goldman & Eiduson, 2021, p. 10).

*Please note, if a student is consistently missing class, or has not attended a class in the first two weeks of the term, then they cannot continue in the course. This is to support the student's overall success, and is in keeping with Bentley's attendance policy, which states the following:

"…An enrolled student who misses the first week of class and is not present at the first class meeting after the add/swap period ends needs faculty and department chair approval to remain in the class. If the add/swap period has ended, instructors retain the right to deny admission to a course to any student who is not yet enrolled.

…An enrolled student may not be absent from class for a prolonged period of time. The definition of prolonged period is:
- Two or more consecutive weeks during any fall, spring or summer term;
- Two consecutive classes during a four, six, eight or ten week session;
- Any absence during an intensive course.

In cases of a prolonged absence, faculty members should notify either the Registrar's Office or Academic Services."

In either of these situations, a student will likely struggle to catch up with the course and the other students, and their opportunity for success is diminished. Contacting the Academic Services team or the Registrar's Office right away is the best to way to ensure the student is connected with the appropriate resources.

Expectations & Policies

*Normalize Disruptions. **Adapting to difficult and disruptive times is not easy, but it may be a good starting point to navigate the new normal in contemporary higher education settings.***

Strategies and Suggestions

Not a trend, the new normal. We are entering a new normal in higher education. As a business major, this shift reminds me of the first book I read in my first year in business school- Who Moved My Cheese. The book presents a parable of how four different mice adapted to change in their context. While the book can deliver many lessons, in simple terms, it highlights the importance of finding the courage to move forward in turbulent times and learn to adapt quickly. Changes in demographics, priorities shifts, and financial and health crises have challenged assumptions and practices in education. Adapting to difficult and disruptive times is not easy, but it may be a good starting point to navigate the new normal in contemporary higher education settings successfully.

Personalized Learning Visioning. Crossland and Ruedel (2021) indicated that "flexible learning environments, pedagogies are driven by: Fostering student independence and agency (the ability to make choices and take an active role in learning); encouraging collaborative learning, and approaching teaching as a process of constructing knowledge, making meaning, and making connections across learning areas." To normalize micro and macro disruptions in our most diverse classrooms, adopting a flexible teaching style and adopting flexible learning strategies may be a good starting point to promote well-being in the classroom. Educators should consider adapting their learning environments and teaching style to meet students' needs in uncertain times.

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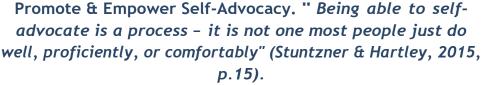
Strategies and Suggestions

Personalized Learning Visioning. Some learners may have been impacted by the pandemic directly or indirectly. This Personalized Learning Visioning Tool from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) may help guide educators' efforts to support the well-being of all students.

Diversify activities to support all learners in challenging times. It is critical to acknowledge that the pandemic and shift in teaching modes challenged conceptions of educational practices – "disruptive change can and will happen" (Rapanta, Botturi & Goodyear, 2021, p. 726). Therefore, to be inclusive consider diversifying activities and when possible, allow your learners to demonstrate knowledge in the format they feel more comfortable.

Encourage autonomy and diversify assignments and practices. Research has determined that "students can be (or become) more autonomous."Adding a mix of "blend regulated activities with flexible ones" and encouraging "peer-interactions and peer-support" may be a good starting point to meet diverse needs in challenging times (Rapanta, Botturi & Goodyear, 2021, p. 726).

Expectations & Policies

Promote & Empower Self-Advocacy. " *Being able to self-advocate is a process – it is not one most people just do well, proficiently, or comfortably*" (Stuntzner & Hartley, 2015, p.15).

Strategies and Suggestions

Avoid Assumptions. Please do not assume that the student knows all resources available, can advocate for themselves, and or feel comfortable accessing the available resources on and off campus. First-year students, first-generation students, and Historically Marginalized Racial and Ethnic Groups (HMREG) may be more hesitant to use resources or may not know how to access them.

Mindfulness Self-compassion Statement. Educators should consider developing a statement emphasizing self-advocacy as a process of mindfulness and Self-compassion on their course syllabus.

Educators should also encourage students to learn about their strengths and areas of improvement so that they can partner with student affairs and other campus organizations to learn coping skills and develop resiliency.

Checkpoints, encouragement, and differentiation. Educators should consider developing knowledge assessments and encouraging students to complete checkpoints.

Encourage students to seek support for the areas they might need and to challenge themselves in the areas they exceed. Educators should also consider providing recommended readings and additional resources at various levels, so students have the appropriate levels of challenge.

Expectations & Policies

References & Additional Sources/Resources

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