



Supporting Students' Mental Health, a Two-Part Series

Part I: Making Mental Health Visible in Class

Mental health has become an increasingly important topic on college campuses (Lipsom et al, 2018). According to Learning Support Services at Villanova, 728 students registered with their office to receive mental health accommodations (AY 2021-22), an 11% increase from the previous year. This increase follows a 21% increase (AY 2020-21) and an 8% increase (AY 2019-20). You may have noticed that some students seem unfocused, unmotivated, isolated, depressed, or anxious. *What responsibility do we have to our students' mental health, how can we convey our concern/care for students' mental health in our courses?*

When we demonstrate our awareness of students' mental health issues, we help reduce the associated stigma and increase the likelihood that students will utilize appropriate resources (Talebi et al, 2016). The following section suggests practices we may use to support students' mental wellbeing and explicitly convey our care for students' mental health. We invite you to share a practice that you have found helpful (send [e-mail](#)) and we will include it, with credit, in the next issue of VITALITY.

Make your care for students' mental health visible in your syllabus. You may express how students can access resources that support their personal and physical well-being, such as the [Student Health Center](#), the [Counseling Center](#), and the [Office of Health Promotion](#). Sample statement, *College can be quite stressful and challenging. Counseling Centers are there to support all students and they are a great resource. The Counseling Center sees more than 1400 students a year and the counselors can help you be more effective; the consultations are confidential.*

Make mental health more visible in class/lab/studio by showing empathy, offering students flexibility in ways to meet course requirements, and directing them to the appropriate resources and professionals, as needed. The main goal is to acknowledge that mental health may impact all of us and our ability to engage and learn. When we offer caring support and learn about students' main stressors, we help destigmatize mental health, normalize behavior, and thus support all students' learning. For example, faculty polled their students anonymously about due dates for assignments/exams to identify times of stress and adjusted assignment due dates based on the polling results and course schedule. The students greatly appreciated the faculty's concern, asking, and supportive action.



Demonstrate commitment to mental health and well-being throughout your course by checking in with students periodically. Guided reflection activities (written or audio) lend themselves to such check-ins. You may consider some of the following prompts:

- How would you describe your current state of wellbeing (physical, mental, emotional)? What is going well for you? What is not going well for you? What has worked for you in the past when you have been stressed? How can that be helpful to you right now?
- List what and/or who you are grateful for this week and why.
- Describe your support system. Who can you rely on to help and/or ask for help when you feel stressed or need to talk?
- How do you keep track of your assignments this semester? What are three things you can do to manage your workload?
- How are you paying attention to your physical health, e.g., do you get enough sleep and exercise? How does your class/work schedule impact your eating habits? What are things you do and can do to improve your physical health?

You may integrate these low-stakes reflections as part of participation or a journal assignment. Such reflections provide us with insights into students' mental health and provide critical opportunities to engage with the students, follow-up with individual students in-person after class, via e-mail, and/or during in-person or virtual student hours. We have many University-wide and College-based academic and professional support services to support all students' personal growth and success; please click [here](#) to access them. If you are ever concerned that a student may be in imminent danger, i.e., you fear for the health or safety of that student and/or other students in the class, please contact [Public Safety](#): 610-519-4444.

Part II of this series will offer sample language you may find helpful when following up with students and/or suggesting on-campus resources to them.

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References:

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