

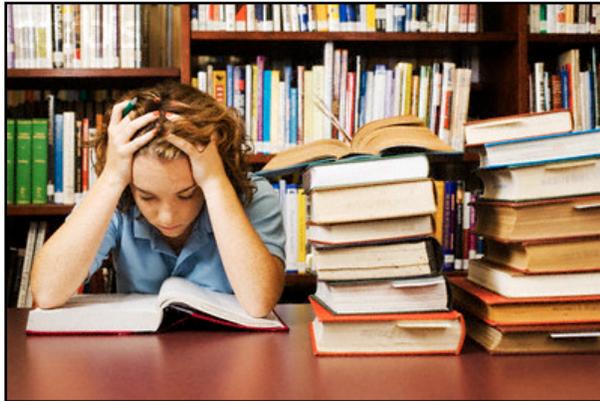
# Pennsylvania Stress University

Should those that *induce* the stress be responsible to *reduce* stress?

Should the education system change to create a more positive environment?

Should there be a larger investment in student counseling and psychological services?

Stress, a major inducer for mental disorders, is a big part of college life, and at some point we all experience it. Some stress is normal and can even be healthy,



but chronic and extreme levels of stress can lead students to do some unhealthy things. From depression and anxiety to drug abuse and suicide, something as common as daily stress may seem small but it can have huge consequences. Our Penn State community must recognize the potential for tragedy stress has and take precautionary action before its simply too late. We live in Happy Valley so all our students should have the opportunity to be emotionally and mentally "happy" as well.

## TIPS and TRICKS for Deliberations

- 1- LISTEN to everyone's opinions, even if you disagree
- 2- Be open to sharing your ideas
- 3- Be respectful to others, this is not a debate
- 4- We can all learn something from others here if we listen and consider

### What Can College Induced Stress Cause?

Stress over academics and the college transition can lead to tragedy. About a year ago, Madison Holleran, a 19-year-old track star at the University of Pennsylvania, jumped from a Philadelphia parking garage. Although her father claimed that her

suicide was self-induced and did not blame the University, such an incident could have been prevented. If the institution had



communicated the availability of programs to address depression and college stress, Madison's risk of suicide would have been dramatically reduced.

"80% [of college students] frequently experience daily stress," an increase of 20% from the same survey done 5 years ago. With the average onset of depression and anxiety being between the ages of 18 to 25, college is a pivotal point in a person's mental well being.  
-Anxiety and Depression Association of America

OPTION ONE

**Altering the Community**  
 A large component of stress for college students may be the environment surrounding the student, such as their friends, roommates, dorm life, classes, organizations, etc. Overall, more competitive environments tend to result in more stress as opposed to more supportive environments. Therefore, one approach Penn State could take would be to make the Penn State community more supporting through student-run options. This would put more responsibility in the hands of students rather than the university.

While adult counseling and help with stress may help, many young adults may respond better to help from people their own age, or try to rely on themselves to deal with a problem. Young adults may find it easier and less invading to receive help dealing with stress from a fellow student.

This approach details how the University can use student led groups to create a more supportive community at Penn State, and therefore decrease stress.



What Might Be Done	Trade Offs to Consider
Offer student led exercise groups, such as yoga, running, and meditation. These would be free for all students to participate in. Both exercise and meditation have been shown to decrease stress. This venture would encourage students to get involved in these activities, and would help them to meet new people with which to do these activities.	The difficulty is in arranging times that work for interested students and don't interfere with other fitness programs. Many students would not take part in this idea, and the ones who would, likely would run on their own or take yoga classes regardless. It would likely result in extra cost for the university, with little participation.
Establish study groups in the dorms, organized by the RA's and led by upperclassmen volunteers who did well in the courses. Our target audience would be primarily freshmen and sophomores. This would provide a support/study group for difficult classes.	It could be discouraging for students to be surrounded by others who grasp the material much easier than them. Students in more advanced and more difficult classes, where most of college stress comes from, would not see the benefit of this action.
Have RA's host events in the residence halls around big exams to de-stress students, such as yoga, pick-up sport games, and free coffee and pizza.	This approach would put additional stress on the RA, who also has to deal with difficult classes. Also, it would be hard to convince stressed out students to leave their studying.
Add student leaders into residence halls whose job is to run support groups for students who have a hard time with stress, and to offer free counseling to students who deal with too much stress.	College students under a lot of stress may may not want to admit that they are or talk about it with other students, especially if they do not know the student leaders personally.

*“Yoga can help reduce stress because it promotes relaxation, which is the natural opposite of stress.”*

-teenshelath.org

**OPTION TWO**

Studies show that stress is an issue for more than 80% of college students nationwide, and this number continues to rise.

A significant portion of this stress revolves around the pressure on students to perform in their academically rigorous classes. Many courses are structured to emphasize the product of education rather than the process or promise of learning. Often times, the overwhelming work load, from large assignments and exams, can detract from the core fundamentals of learning.

Penn State should reconstruct its curriculum to put a greater emphasis on the true process of learning and lessen the importance of strict grades and exams. This could potentially decrease overall stress of students and improve mental health.

What Might Be Done	Trade Offs to Consider
Offer alternative ways to evaluate student work	If schools implement new forms of evaluations there will be discontinuity and inequity between school systems.
Remove letter grade system in favor of satisfactory/no credit or narrative evaluation system	Graduate schools often require a GPA and letter grade transcript which could be problematic for grad school applicants.
Keep a letter grade system, but eliminate large exams in favor of more frequent, smaller quizzes	It is possible that the uniqueness of the system may deter prospective students.
Encourage the sharing of knowledge in the classroom through group projects rather than individual work.	Although this could reduce stress from exams, there could still be stress present from the project grade. Depending on how the projects are evaluated, students could still face the same amount of stress as found with exams.
Immerse students in the material they are learning by participating in research and learning workshops as an alternative to lectures and exams.	It is likely that there would not be enough professors to make this type of educational experience a reality. In order to carry out research, there would be a need for more individual attention which would require an increase in faculty and an increase in funds for the school.



**“I made a 4.0 my first semester, and have since been trying mercilessly to maintain it. Now I have regular visits with a therapist and am on two medications for depression/ anxiety.”**

**-Anonymous Sophomore (Campuscalm.com)**

### OPTION THREE

The final option for Penn State to alleviate stress is by improving facilities designated to help students with stress and associated mental illness.

The Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at Penn State accommodates 3200 students per year who suffer from stress, depression, anxiety, and other mental illness. However, a lot of students, approximately 1/3, are turned away due to lack of capacity. As a result, most students turn to other forms of help, like therapy, which is expensive and not covered by most insurance companies. More commonly, students ignore their issues because of the inconvenience.

Penn State has the responsibility to help these stressed students by investing more time and money to improve the conditions of existing facilities, like the Counseling and Psychological Services. Improving these services should be Penn State's priority in order to help students with stress and other associated mental illnesses. Although these facilities have been established, they must be improved and revamped in order to accommodate the rising stress for students.



What Might Be Done	Trade Offs to Consider
<p>CAPS can provide long-term help for its students and let the student decide when he or she is ready to leave the counselor</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAPS does not have enough certified counselors or space to allow all students to stay for an extended amount of time</li> <li>• There would not be enough room to concentrate on students who have more extreme situations, like for those who are border-line suicidal, those who have eating disorders, or those who have been sexually assaulted</li> </ul>
<p>CAPS could provide more group therapy sessions at more convenient times and more frequently</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They would need more funding in order to hire certified counselors</li> <li>• There could not be a good turnout because people are still hesitant to talk about their issues in front of others. The money invested would be a sunken cost.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The De-Stress Zone is a section of the University Health Services that provides students access to iPods and computers. Students can listen to relaxing music and use biofeedback programs in this section.</li> <li>• The De-Stress Zone can be provided in other areas other than just the University Health Services</li> </ul>	<p>Students who are bored can easily use these facilities, not allowing stressed students access to relaxing. Also, most students need to talk to others in order to relax.</p>
<p>The entirety of Penn State's stress management facilities could make themselves more well-known so that students feel like they have easy access to a place that can help them (more accessible)</p>	<p>An over-exposure of such a facility could overwhelm students, and eventually they may get sick of hearing about the whole thing in general (bringing up anxiety constantly may cause more anxiety)</p>
<p>CAPS could be given more power by allowing the counselors to give some excused absences, 1-3 days, to students who need the time away in order to recuperate</p>	<p>Some students may abuse this system and use the excuse of having a stressful issue to get out of classes or to avoid deadlines</p>

***“At Penn State, CAPS is largely underfunded and struggles to meet the demand of students for counseling services. In fact, CAPS still has a waiting list to see new students despite adding five new staff members after a \$300,000 funding increase this past year.” -Zach Berger, Onward State***