

FALL 2021 FACULTY GUIDE ON STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

This list of suggestions was compiled by experts, including Zoe Ragouzeos, Ph.D., Executive Director of Counseling and Wellness Services at New York University and President of the Mary Christie Institute, as well as those who participated in the webinar event: “[The Role of Faculty in Student Mental Health](#),” based on the [survey report](#) that was released in April of this year. The guide was also informed by nine students from six different universities, interviewed by the Institute during the summer of 2021.



ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT HAS HAPPENED

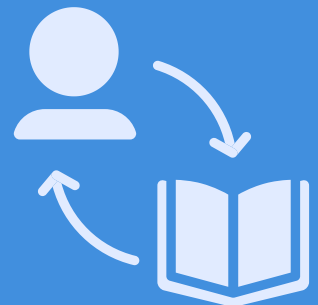
Research shows that experiences during the global pandemic have significantly affected student mental health. It is important to acknowledge feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and fear, as well as the loss and grief many students are still processing. It's okay to appropriately share that you, too, were impacted and that we are recovering together as a community.

STUDENT VOICES

"Emails about wellness are fine, but it is so much better when professors actually talk about mental health."

KNOW HOW TO HELP

Faculty interact with students more frequently than any other adults on campus and are often the most likely to observe if a student is unwell, particularly if there is a pattern of unhealthy behavior. Given this relationship, it is most important that faculty understand how to refer a student to professional help on campus.



STUDENT VOICES

"Poor performance is not the only indicator of a mental health problem. Professors can be concerned about someone before they are so distressed they can't complete their work."



CULTIVATE COLLABORATION

Many students are reporting feelings of loneliness. And as they return to in-person classes, many are reporting "rustiness" with their social skills. Classes can still be one of their best opportunities to interact with others. Facilitating student-to-student interactions to cultivate cross-class connections can benefit students' sense of community and increase engagement in the coursework. Consider group projects, meet and greets, icebreakers and other connection-building exercises.

COMMUNICATE CARE

Faculty can convey that they care with simple practices such as learning students' names, checking in with students at the beginning of class and throughout the semester, and monitoring student stress levels and workload. Communicating care for student wellbeing can help cultivate a more compassionate campus community, as students often look to faculty for leadership.



STUDENT VOICES

"I wish my professors considered all of the other things that are going on in my life besides just their class."

"Mental health days can be super helpful if you're feeling overwhelmed."

CONSIDER THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

Academic stress, in the extreme, can be debilitating for some students. Showing flexibility on assignments and grading, when appropriate, can help alleviate stress, particularly with heavy course loads and dueling priorities. Students also report that pacing assignments and deadlines, offering extra credit, and considering their other college-wide activities can help keep them on track.



STUDENT VOICES

"If professors were to set clear outlines and break up assignments into smaller chunks, that would be hugely helpful."

"It's very stressful when there is no room for flexibility."

OFFER WAYS TO ENGAGE

Even before the pandemic, some students did not feel comfortable raising their hands in class. Consider offering a variety of ways for students to participate in class. This will allow all students to earn the credit they deserve for participating in class while taking into consideration their different comfort levels with doing so verbally.

