

# Mental Health and URM Students

CEE Faculty Meeting/DEI Presentation  
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UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE  
**ENGINEERING**



- I am not an expert in this area!
- I am just scratching the surface
- My terminology may not be perfect
- Intent: awareness of mental health to spur reflection on how we mentor, advise, interact, and teach



- Underrepresented and minority student groups in higher education experience:
  - Isolation & loneliness
  - Financial stress
  - Racial battle fatigue



- BIPOC students often receive lower quality mental health care
  - *If* mental health care is accessible at all
- Students are also often misdiagnosed
- Linkages exist between mental health and substance abuse



## These issues have been exacerbated by the pandemic

- From The Steve Fund:
  - Interrupted high school/college transition plans
    - More so for non-white students than for white students
  - Lower course loads are more likely among students of color, delaying graduation



## These issues have been exacerbated by the pandemic

- "Students of color are more likely than are white students to feel overwhelmed, but less likely to seek mental-health treatment" - Chronicle of Higher Ed.



## Graduate students are impacted, too (More from The Steve Fund)

- "Among graduate and professional students, the prevalence of a major depressive disorder is **two times higher** in 2020 than in 2019, and the prevalence of generalized anxiety disorder is **1.5 times higher** than in 2019."



- 153 PhD students in the sciences
  - Not indicated these are URM students
- Assessed
  - Anxiety, depression, burnout, work engagement
- Measured CAR levels (cortisol)





- Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey
  - **exhaustion** scale: 5 items
    - e.g., “I feel emotionally drained by my work”
  - **cynicism** scale: 4 items
    - e.g., “I have become less enthusiastic about my work”



- Utrecht Work Engagement instrument
  - **vigor** scale: 6 items
    - e.g., “at my work, I feel bursting with energy”
  - **dedication** scale: 6 items
    - e.g., “I am enthusiastic about my work”



## What they found...

- 68% expressed anxiety
- 50% expressed depression
- 28% scored “high” in burnout
- 9% scored high work engagement
- Significant positive (*in a bad way*) correlation between time in grad school & anxiety and depression



## What they found...

- Higher anxiety and depression vs. 1044 non-grad student employees
- **Physiological response:** higher CAR in those with anxiety, depression, and high burnout



## What can we do? (From The Steve Fund)

- Revisit course design
  - UDL
  - CoE inclusive teaching modules
- Look for signs of stress
  - Anxiety, apathy, abrupt changes, absences, lack of focus, multiple expressions of unhappiness
- Know the University's mental health resources



## What else can we do?

- Be flexible, where possible
- Build in breaks
- Build connections
- Work to make university spaces more welcoming for all (*in any way you can*)



# A DEI approach to mental health

## Diversity

recognizing a  
range of lived  
experiences  
among our  
students

## Equity

equal  
opportunity for  
access to  
services and  
understanding  
existing barriers

## Inclusion

intentional  
expression of  
value of each of  
our students



## For further reading

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/news/2020/07/28/488044/mental-health-support-students-color-coronavirus-pandemic/>

<https://togetherall.com/en-us/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/08/Togetherall-DEI-Whitepaper-2021.pdf>

<https://marychristieinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/The-Role-of-Faculty-in-Student-Mental-Health.pdf>

<https://www.stevelfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CRISIS-RESPONSE-TASK-FORCE-STEVE-FUND-REPORT.pdf>

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnins.2021.593562/full>

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2021/02/24/educators-are-key-in-protecting-student-mental-health-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

[https://www.chronicle.com/article/did-covid-break-students-mental-health?cid2=gen\\_login\\_refresh&cid=gen\\_sign\\_in](https://www.chronicle.com/article/did-covid-break-students-mental-health?cid2=gen_login_refresh&cid=gen_sign_in)

<https://www.smcm.edu/wellness/help-a-student/signs-and-symptoms-of-distress-in-students/>