

## STRESS ON CAMPUS: Understanding Sources, Intensity, & Consequences – Responding Effectively

Adjusting to a new, independent living environment; managing the expectations of family; becoming one's own person; making new friends and gambling on whom to trust; dealing with peer norms, values, and differences; navigating the complexities of intimate relationships; exploring sexuality; making choices about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs; meeting financial responsibilities and knowing what sacrifices today's costs may mean for the future; registering for classes on time and being sure you made the right choices; managing class work and assignments; passing exams and preparing for graduation and the world of work. – all while staying healthy both physically and psychologically. It's everyday life, or more precisely, everyday *student* life. And the effects of stress are felt in **health** (physical and psychological), **learning**, and **relationships**.

All of us face choices, challenges, and events that cause stress. Their intensity and frequency vary – and our ways of coping and managing stress vary as well. Experience with stressful life experiences, a strong mind – a high level of emotional and psychological maturity – and a healthy physical and mental condition strengthen us and help us effectively manage stress. But is this how you would characterize the majority of students on your campus? And how about your staff and faculty? Are they prepared to manage stress – and even to make it work for them?

### Not Just Students

The phrase “stress on campus” tends to call up images of frantic students cramming for exams, but students obviously aren't the only ones who experience stress. Stress in the personal and professional lives of faculty, staff, and administrators may arise from different sources – but it may be equally (or more intense) and have equally important consequences. The bottom line is that stress is a common and often underestimated campus-wide problem that affects health and learning.

### Stress as a Contributor to Other Problems

If you dig deeply enough, you can often identify stress as contributor to many of the problems with health, learning, and relationships observed on your campus.

Consider this simplified scenario:

1. Students (or members of the faculty and staff) experience a pattern of stressful events and choices that are poorly or inconsistently managed.
2. Over time, they develop health problems – reduced resistance to minor infections, weight concerns, hypertension, ulcers, sleep disorders –

and their risk of using sex, drugs or alcohol as a temporary “solution” increases.

3. For students: academic performance decreases resulting in poor grades, failed classes, delayed graduation, or transfers to another institution.
4. For staff, faculty, and administrators: professional performance decreases, morale declines, decision making ability is hindered, and early opportunities to recognize and intervene in students' health, academic, and relationship problems are overlooked.
5. For the campus community as a whole: health concerns and substance abuse problems (a kind of self-medication) increase, the campus-wide sense of community weakens, and the social and learning environments fail to help students achieve their potential.

### Stress Management Programs on Campus

The first, and most important steps in managing stress, are to identify the sources, recognize the ways in which members of the campus community experience stress, and understand the effects of stress in the community.

1. Explore all major sources of stress for students, faculty, and staff.
2. Assess the intensity of each source in terms of who and how many are affected, what its consequences are, and what connections it has to other campus community problems.
3. Perform a needs assessment to determine what resources students, faculty, and staff need.
4. Establish priorities in developing a strategic stress reduction and management program that addresses both “systems” problems and personal needs for members of the campus community.

Keeling & Associates can help your campus understand and address stress in ways that enhance health, learning, and relationships.

### For More Information >>

To learn more about K&A and our services in this area, please visit [www.keelingassociates.com](http://www.keelingassociates.com) or call us at 212.229.4750.

#### Related Resources:

- **Information Sheets from Keeling & Associates:**
  - Campus Community Initiatives for [Health & Learning](#)
  - Health & Counseling Center Assessments & Strategies: [Linked to Health & Learning](#)