

Creating a Culture of Caring at UMass Amherst

Supporting Student Wellbeing and Mental Health

UMassAmherst

Student mental health is a [growing issue on college and university campuses](#) with approximately one in three students meeting criteria for a clinically significant mental health problem. [UMatter at UMass](#) was developed to help faculty and staff recognize and respond to students in distress. Particularly during COVID-19, with most classes taught remotely, it is especially important to notice and reach out to students who are struggling, and to connect them to staff trained to help. In support of that effort, consider these classroom practices:

1. Normalize the need for help

Approachability is the quality students say they most value in their instructors. Show that you are a safe person to talk to:

USE A SYLLABUS STATEMENT: invite students to reach out for help early and to come to you with concerns. Include mental health as well as academic and tutoring resources. (See sample UMass syllabus statement on next page.)

SHARE A STORY OF STRUGGLE AND STRENGTH: tell students about a time you needed help in school. This can be a powerful way to illustrate that seeking help is a sign of strength.

2. Listen actively with Validate, Appreciate, and Refer (V-A-R)

Struggling students can often be helped through compassionate outreach, with active listening and appropriate responses.

VALIDATE their experience (use phrases like “That makes sense.” and “That sounds difficult.”)

APPRECIATE the student’s courage for being open with you (i.e. “Thank you for sharing with me.”)

REFER them to support services. See next page for referrals.

3. Embed courses with wellbeing practices

Include practical actions that promote well-being:

START CLASSES WITH A MINUTE OF SILENCE: Ask students to take five slow breaths, inhaling through the nose, then exhaling through the mouth.

AVOID MIDNIGHT OR LATE NIGHT DEADLINES: Set deadlines at a time of day that encourages students to get enough sleep.

ASSIGN SELF-CARE ACTIVITIES AS HOMEWORK: ‘Sleep for at least seven hours,’ or ‘take a break from social media.’ Emphasize that success isn’t worth it if we are too stressed or sick to enjoy it.

4. Practice self-care and seek resources when needed

Model the healthy behaviors we want our students to cultivate:

SET GOOD BOUNDARIES. It’s OK to not always be available. You cannot and do not need to operate as a 24-hour student help desk.

TAKE A DAILY ‘TEN-MINUTE SABBATICAL.’ Reconnect to the world beyond yourself and your work

PRIORITIZE YOUR OWN WELL-BEING. Take time to eat nutritious foods, exercise, play, rest, reflect, stretch, and grow in your life.

Adapted with permission from [Creating a Culture of Caring: Practical Approaches for College and University Faculty to Support Student Wellbeing and Mental Health](#), a faculty resource developed by [Active Minds](#) and The [Association of College and University Educators](#) (ACUE).

Syllabi Statement: Wellness and Success

You are not alone at UMass – many people care about your well-being and many resources are available to help you thrive and succeed. During this time, you may be experiencing new stresses related to the COVID-19 pandemic in addition to other pressures such as health, money, family, and academic concerns or stress and trauma from societal inequities and violence. Coursework is challenging and classes are not the only demand in your life.

You have resilience and are already using effective strategies to help you achieve your educational goals. Take stock of these and consider what new steps or resources could be helpful. Getting enough sleep, exercising, eating well, and connecting with others are all antidotes to stress. If you are struggling academically, reach out to your instructors and advisors prior to deadlines and before the demands of exams, papers, and projects reach their peak.

Students experiencing challenges including stress, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, loneliness, and trauma, or who feel down or alienated, can find it helpful to connect with one or more of the many supportive resources on campus that stand ready to assist you. You matter at UMass.

Student Support Resources

ACADEMIC ADVICE AND SUPPORT

- [Academic Dean](#)
- [Academic Advisor](#)
- [Writing Center](#)
- [Learning Resource Center](#)

SINGLE-STOP RESOURCES

- [Referrals](#) for personal, financial, or life challenges that interfere with college success and well-being
- Expanded resources for [support during COVID-19](#)

OFFICES THAT CAN HELP

- [Center for Counseling and Psychological Health](#)
24/7 emergency crisis intervention, support groups and workshops, online therapy and resources, brief psychotherapy and referrals
- [Dean of Students Office](#)
Advice and support for managing challenging or crisis related matters
- [UMass Police Department](#)
Immediate emergency response, anonymous tip reporting, theft prevention, community safety, and self-defense programs and training
- [University Health Services](#)
24/7 medical advice and triage, walk-in clinic, nutritional counseling, sports medicine, and more
- [Disability Services](#)
Help registering and accommodating students with all types of disabilities
- [Student Legal Services Office](#)
Confidential legal counseling and advice for all fee-paying students with any legal matter
- [Psychological Services Center](#)
Individual, couples and group therapy and assessment services
- [Ombuds Office](#)
Facilitation and informal mediation; resolution of grade disputes
- [Equal Opportunity Office](#)
Upholds university's commitment to access and opportunity for all

COMMUNITIES OF SUPPORT

- [Residential Life](#)
Support for on campus students; help addressing roommate disputes and residence hall quality of life
- [Off Campus Student Life](#) (OCSL)
Community connections and programs for students living off-campus
- [International Programs Office](#) (IPO)
Networking and assistance for international students and scholars at UMass and UMass students studying abroad
- [Center for Multicultural Advancement and Student Success](#) (CMASS)
Mentoring, workshops, advocacy, scholarship and internship opportunities, graduate school preparation and career development
- [Stonewall Center](#)
Programming, advocacy, and support for LGBTQIA+ students and allies
- [Student Parent Programs](#)
Support for students with children
- [Student Veteran Resource Center](#)
A welcoming place for veterans, active military members, and their families to study, network, learn, seek support, and get help with benefits
- [Center for Women and Community](#)
Information and referrals, community education, general counseling, and empowerment-based support groups for survivors of all genders
- [Men and Masculinities Center](#)
Supports male student success and the development of healthy masculinities
- [Office of Religious and Spiritual Life](#)
Educational programs, advocacy, dialogue, interfaith programs and service
- [Center for Health Promotion](#)
Peer wellness coaching, alcohol screening and brief intervention, support for students in recovery