

Perceptions of Stress and Health Services Among Undergraduate Students at Boston University

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Abstract:

This study is designed to explore the perceptions of stress among undergraduate students attending Boston University and what supports students utilize to address their stress. Since most students are affected by stress at some point during their experience at a university, it is important to understand the scope of stress and experiences with health services on campus. By doing so, we can assess if services and coping mechanisms available to students are sufficient. Data was collected by using qualitative research methods such as participant observations at university dining halls and student events, in-depth interviews with students and a Student Health Ambassador, focus group discussions with mapping activities. The main findings of this study concluded that stress is extremely prevalent at Boston University and academics contribute the most to students' stress. Other common stressors are self-inflicted, such as holding oneself to a high standard; while others feel pressures from family members and peers to incessantly succeed. We analyzed the health effects stress has on students and lack of sleep or irregular sleeping patterns were the main health concerns reported among all asked. Lastly, in terms of stress coping mechanisms, most students enjoy engaging in physical activity when they feel stressed, while others prefer talking to friends, roommates, or family members.

Most students lacked a complete understanding of the mental health services offered at Boston University. When asked about their perception of Boston University's Behavioral Medicine office, those who had never visited had only heard negative feedback from other students; while those who had visited, suggested a lot of changes that can be made to alleviate these negative experiences. In the future, this study can be used to instruct Boston University faculty about the issue of stress on campus, to make improvements, and to raise awareness about the current mental health programs.

Keywords: Stress, Boston University, undergraduate, students, health services, mental health

Introduction:

Many students experience stress during their university experience. In a cross-sectional study by Shaikh et al. [1], researchers analyzed medical students' perceptions and coping strategies of stress and found that 90% of the students reported having one or more episodes of stress in college. In the literature, academics and relationships were found to be the main stressors among students. Låftman, Almquist, and Östberg analyzed the stressors in eighth-grade students at a high-performing school and found that younger students put pressure on themselves to perform well academically, especially when witnessing the achievements of their classmates or older siblings [2]. They also explored different gendered responses to stress and found that girls were more likely to hold themselves at a high academic performance standard, and in return put themselves in high levels of stress. Similarly, women were seen to have higher school stress spillover than men [3]. In regards to noting relationships as a stressor, studies have been consistent. In a literature review by Hurst, Baranik, and Daniel [4] relationship stressors associated with family, romantic, peer and faculty relations were seen to be a main concern for undergraduate students. And relationships were noted to be a top reason for stress and a commonly reported theme in regards to stress [1].

Studies have been consistent in noting that lack of sleep, headaches, and fatigue are among health implications of stress [1]. Stress can lead to depression, and ongoing cases can lead to increased levels of cortisol, resulting in health complications such as weight gain and concentration impairment. Due to the impact stress has on health, our study aims to understand student perceptions on stress and on the effectiveness of health services at Boston University. While studies have provided valuable insight into the stress for college students, there were significant gaps, we aim to fill with our research. Previous studies focused on specific demographics such as medical students, eighth-graders, or only first year undergraduate students [1] [5]. We aim to include as many demographics from BU's campus as possible, including students from various years, majors, and schools. In addition, while Nichter, Nichter, Carkoglu & the Tobacco Etiology Research Network [6] conducted a longitudinal study and found smoking as a common coping mechanism for stress, previous studies lacked noting further coping mechanisms for stress. Our study aims to explore more coping mechanisms including the use of campus mental health resources. Lastly, while previous studies used questionnaires in regards to stress and students [1] [3], we will conduct focus groups and in-depth interviews to allow participants to expand on their feelings of stress, to offer a better understanding of perspectives of stress and student health services at Boston University.

Our study is based on the conceptual framework that many different factors influence perceptions of stress. These include major, relationships, resources available, and other health concerns connected to a student's stress level among many factors in our concept map (Appendix A). Perceptions of stress are connected to awareness of mental health and stress. This is also related to their awareness of resources that are available to them, and to the coping mechanisms they utilize. Relationships can influence stress levels because they can compete with time and energy necessary for school and other responsibilities. Conversely, happy relationships provide support and can reduce stress. Major and level of schooling are other indicators of stress levels. For students who are already accustomed to their environment, such as seniors, stress levels may be lower than for freshmen who are new to the environment.

Study Purpose:

This study is important because every student is affected by stress at some point in time during their experience at a university. By understanding perceptions of stress, we hope to understand the scope of the problem, and whether or not sufficient supports are available to students coping with stress. Our objective is to understand how prevalent stress is at Boston University and whether or not people recognize it as a problem that warrants intervention. Then by assessing factors that contribute to stress, we hope to understand the usage of services offered by BU. Through speaking to faculty as well as students, we will identify if there is a gap between services being offered and services being utilized. Our research site is limited to Boston University and our participants will all be Boston University students and faculty.

Methods:

We selected to use four different methods to collect data. These methods included: participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and mapping. All participants were selected by the criteria of undergraduate status, studying at Boston University, and based on their college of study within Boston University.

We started our investigation by performing participant observation and observed students in two different environments. The first environment was in a campus mental health event, or ‘Wellness Fair’ at Warren Towers, and the second environment was in an on-campus dining hall in Warren Towers. We selected these environments in order to encounter a range of students. In the mental health event, we were observing interactions and conversations coming from students who already have an interest and awareness about mental health. In the dining hall, we encountered a diverse mixture of students to get an idea of the general student population’s interactions and conversations related to stress. We observed what behaviors and conversations students in both environments were having related to stress.

After participant observation, we performed in-depth interviews. This allowed us to hear more detailed accounts of perceptions of stress and health services at Boston University, in a comfortable setting. For our in-depth interviews we selected two undergraduate students from different majors, these were performed in the Warren Dining Hall and GSU respectively. These locations were selected due to participant preference to provide a convenient, comfortable environment. We also interviewed a former Boston University student who transferred to another school. This interview was performed by phone for participant convenience. We performed semi-structured interviews and used the same interview guide for both current all student participants (Appendix E). Our final in-depth interview was with a Student Health worker in Sargent college. This interview was also semi-structured and used a different interview guide (Appendix F).

Once we heard personal accounts of experiences, we performed two focus groups. In both focus groups, we aimed to select students from a variety of colleges within Boston University. The focus groups, provided a forum for guided discussion of stress and health services on campus. These focus groups contained four and five students respectively, and were also semi-structured following a topic guide (Appendix G). Both interviews were conducted in a conference room in Sargent.

During our focus groups, we also used our fourth method to gather data. We performed a mapping exercise in which students were given a campus map of Boston University (Appendix B) marked areas they associate with stress and with relieving stress. The members of the focus group then discussed the areas they marked as part of their introductions. This was used to initiate conversation and make participants feel comfortable to talk.

After collecting our data, we transcribed all interviews and focus groups. Then we used coding and used nine codes to organize our data. The codes included academics, internal stressors, external stressors, relationships/social life, overall health/sleep, external support systems, coping mechanisms, awareness/understanding of stress, and Boston University Services. Using these nine codes, we then condensed them into four themes including causes of stress, health and behavioral impact, overcoming stress, and stress on campus (Appendix C). Summarizing the data into themes allowed us to pull together the common threads from all methods of data collection.

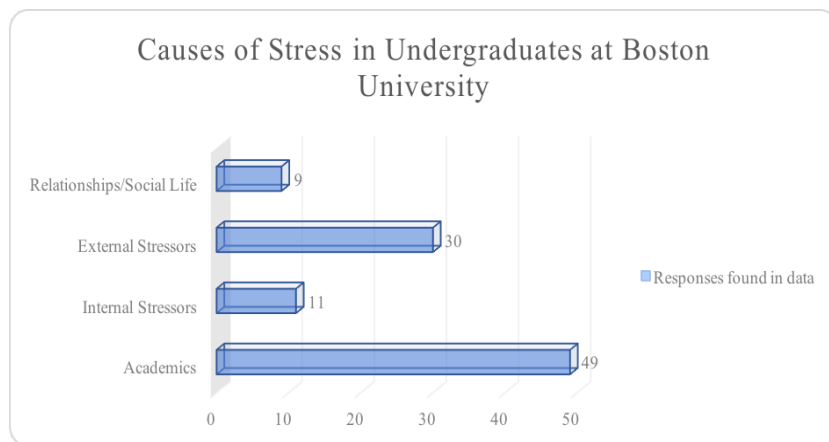
Results:

During our recruitment process, it was important to us that we acquire a group of well- represented participants for use in both interviews and focus group discussions. In doing so, we asked students from several colleges to participate in our focus group discussion as well as our in-depth interviews. For the two focus groups, we had two students from the College of Arts & Sciences , two students from the Sargent College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, two students from the College of Engineering, two students from the College of Communication, one student from the Questrom School of Business and

one student from the School of Education. All of the participants were upperclassmen and were female except for one. For the In-depth interviews, we had one COM student, one Pre-Med Student, one former Boston University student and one student health ambassador. All of the participants in the in-depth interviews were male except for one.

With participant observations, two focus groups and four in-depth interviews, four themes emerged. The four themes were *Causes of Stress*, *Health and Behavioral Impact*, *Overcoming Stress* and *Stress on Campus*. After analyzing the data, we concluded that stress is inevitable but management is key. Participants in the study emphasized that a restructuring of the entire health services program would be beneficial and that Boston University should grant students with more mental health appointments, have an on campus psychiatrist rather than making referrals, ask for student's opinions on what would work best for them and create more student support groups.

The first theme found through analysis of the data was, *Causes of Stress*. We defined this theme as any factors that cause or contribute to the stress levels of our participants. Four common sub-themes emerged from the data we received. The four sub-themes were, Academics, Internal Stressors, External Stressors and Relationships/Social life. In data revealed that the sub-theme Academics was indicated as a major stressor which related to schoolwork, course load, Majors and schools. Internal Stressors was defined as holding yourself to high standards and thoughts about the future. External Stressors was explained as any non self-inhibited stressors as well as non self-inhibited stressors from family pressures, professors, jobs, etc. The last sub-theme was Relationships/social life. This dealt with worrying about family and friends or relationships. Most of the participants expressed their causes of stress as a result of these four themes. Meanwhile, majority of the participants highlighted the fact that the main source of their stress was from academics. The chart shows the amount of responses from data that shows stress. There is an



overwhelming majority of Academic related responses. We asked our participants, what causes stress in their lives. A respondent said, “So I would say school, academics is the number one stressor that I’ve encountered but I also see that relationship issues can be a trouble-whether that’s trouble with a roommate, or romantic relationship. Financial pressure is another big stressor” (Student Health Ambassador, In-depth Interview).

The second theme that developed was *Health and Behavioral Impact*. We defined this as the ways in which stress influenced the behaviors and health status of our participants. The sub-theme that emerged was Overall Health and Sleep. This was characterized by changes in sleep pattern, moods and eating patterns. The participants recalled different experiences they had in which their causes of stress impacted how they sleep, eat and how that function throughout the day. We asked our participants, “How do you feel stress impacts other parts of your life or health?” One of the respondents said, “Lack of sleep. Nights where you... weeks, months, where you only get five hours of sleep a night. Um, I get stress pains in my sides, lack of eating, sleeping... basically human functioning” (Participant, Focus Group 1).

The third theme that developed through an analysis of our data was *Overcoming Stress*. We defined Overcoming Stress as the ways in which participants would behave when confronted with the stress of others and the resources that they used to either cope with or overcome their own stress. Within this theme two subthemes emerged, External Support Systems and Coping Mechanisms. External Support Systems included examples of how participants helped others when they encountered stress as well as how participants reach out to people or systems for support during times of heightened stress. Coping Mechanisms represented a combination of both the ways that students manage their stress and the activities that they engage in to destress. Participants frequently listed friends, family and behavioral health professionals as examples of support systems during periods of stress. Listening to music, watching tv, working out and napping were all common ways of relieving stress amongst our participants . An example of this theme from our data collection, “ Go to the gym, I run or do cardio something that allows me to just escape and get out some energy that sometimes just pent up. I also play an instrument, I don’t know that helps me.” (Participant, Focus Group 1)

The final theme to emerge was *Stress on Campus*, which we defined as participants understanding of stress on campus as well as their knowledge of available mental health services at BU. Awareness/understanding of stress and Boston University services were the two subthemes that we chose to analyze further. Within Awareness/Understanding Stress we focused on participants knowledge of mental health and Boston University services, impressions of what stress is and perceptions of the prevalence of stress. Boston University services included responses that related to knowledge of available services, concerns over the current systems and suggestions for improvement. An example of a response highlighting this theme “ I saw that there were lots of opportunities on campus for health and mental health and many places to go to reach out. Boston University I think that before that I didn’t really know that much, I didn’t know that there were these things available. I had heard that behavioral services was there, but, I think that all I had heard about behavioral services was people’s bad experiences with it. And that’s what I associated with it. ” (Participant, Focus Group 1).

Discussion:

Overall, the aim of the present study was to analyze how students at Boston University perceive stress and the health services provided on campus. With this, we wanted to identify the prominent factors our participants face that serve as a source of their problems. This helped us better understand how stress is perceived, what causes it, how it is dealt with, and what services are available to suffice it.

When analyzing the results, the main *Causes of Stress* for undergraduate students at Boston University were academics and external stressors. We defined external stressors as family pressures, job, and negative stigmas regarding stress that would hinder one from reaching out for help. The research we used to make our literature review also showed academics as a primary stressor in students, Boston University instead of external stressors, it suggested relationships as a secondary factor. In our study, relationships were the least reported for causing a student stress. The only relationships reported by our participants were the ones with their parents and peers regarding the pressures they feel from them and how that causes them distress. This contrast between our study and the other studies looked at for our literature review could be due to our lower sample sizes and duration of our overall experiment. Aside from academics and external stressors, the third highest cause addressed was internal — holding oneself to high standards and thoughts about the future. A similar study was analyzed that was conducted on eight-grade female students who tended to put stress upon themselves by comparing themselves to older siblings and classmates.

Within *Health and Behavioral Impact*, our results from the sub theme ‘overall health and sleep’ were fairly consistent with the findings of the papers analyzed in our literature review. The studies we reviewed focused heavily on the immediate ways in which stress impacts health and found that participants experienced a lack of sleep, headaches and fatigue. Furthermore, some studies mentioned the future impacts that stress can have on the body including increases in cortisol levels and depression. Due to the short duration of our study, we were unable to extract data that pointed to similar conditions in our participants. A further study on the long term implications that stress has on the mental and physical health of college students might reveal similar findings. The findings of our literature review influenced our decision to look specifically at stress and health in our study. Questions from our topic guides asked general questions regarding our participants perceptions of how stress positively or negatively impacts their health. Our inclusion of undergraduate students from varying demographics allowed our results to stand out when compared to the studies of our literature review which typically looked at specific populations. In all, this portion of our study was in agreement with the literature, and did not conflict with current knowledge.

In terms of *Overcoming Stress*, previous studies overlooked the ways in which students behaved and coped with stress. While Nichter, Nichter, Carkoglu & the Tobacco Etiology Research Network [6] found smoking as a common unintentional coping mechanism for stress, previous studies lacked noting further strategies for overcoming stress. We filled this gap in research by identifying different strategies practiced by students including reaching out to external support systems such as friends and family for help; and participating in activities like working out, napping, and watching TV. Previous studies addressed unintentional ways in which students deal with stress. Our study focused primarily on intentional and constructive coping mechanisms used by students. Since we had Boston University students from a wide variety of backgrounds such as schools and major, students practiced different strategies when overcoming stress. Participants noted reaching out to health professionals for support when coping with stress and having negative experiences. This emphasizes the importance of having effective student health services on campus, to help students deal with their stress in a well-informed manner. Overall, our study showed a deeper understanding that management is key when it comes to stress since it will ultimately reduce stress and its health implications.

For *Stress on Campus*, our results agreed with the literature in that most college students experience stress. Our research filled an important gap, because the previous literature did not focus on perceptions of health services, and whether or not they thought there was a need for more attention to mental health. Overall students reported negative experiences or perceptions of Student Health Services. Students cited lack of consistent providers, limited visits, and referral outside of the Boston University system as downfalls of services provided. These responses accurately represent the system Student Health Services has, where students use their psychologists as a temporary service before leaving the system. This is a problem for many students who have insurance that does not sufficiently cover mental health services. These results can be explained by the fact that Boston University has a large student population, and has had increasing demand for behavioral health services. The Student Health Services ambassador stated that staffing is an issue, so their system is overwhelmed. The business of the staff may lead to the negative experiences students are having. This could account for long wait times, reported lack of confidence in staff competency, and the fact that students are referred to an external provider after a set number of visits. In conclusion, the dissatisfaction can be explained by understaffing, limited resources and funding, and more reporting of negative than positive experiences. The other aspect of *Stress on Campus* that we investigated was awareness. Students reported that they felt there was a high level of awareness of stress as an issue on campus, but that there was a divide between knowing stress is present and knowing about

the resources to address it. This gap can be explained again by the size of Boston University and the fact that it is difficult to make sure every student is informed about services.

Conclusion & Implications:

Based on our results, stress and academics seem to go hand in hand. Since stress is inherently inevitable in an academic setting, we feel that management of stress is key. Learning how to properly manage one's stress early on can help prevent many unwanted physical and mental health effects in the future. Thus, we feel it is imperative that there is a place on Boston University's campus where a student can go and feel confident that they will receive the proper care they need and deserve. After asking students about their experiences using the university's Behavioral Health Services, there a few suggestions that we recommend for improvement purposes. First, it would be a good idea to hire more staff, and also more qualified staff. For example, one student recalled her experience at the office by saying she did not feel comfortable talking to the staff members there because she felt they were students who did not really know what they were talking about. Secondly, there needs to be improvements on, what many students refer to as, the 'appointment rule'. Boston University offers students an allotted number of appointments before referring them to a psychiatrist in the Boston area. This raised major red flags for most students since they did not have an insurance plan that would cover these appointments — so they never went. It would be more beneficial if Boston University could hire an on-campus psychiatrist that could diagnose students and write prescriptions if need be. Boston University Behavioral Medicine should send out surveys to students who have used their services, just to show that they care to make improvements based on what students need from them.

There are a lot of student support groups on campus for anyone who is not interested in seeking a clinical route. The biggest concern with these programs is that they are not advertised enough — Boston University is a very large school, so it can be difficult to spread information out to the masses. However, it is imperative that these programs are advertised more. The student health worker that was interviewed said that, "much progress has been made in the last four years, however there is still a lot more that needs to be done." Moving forward, further research could address different types of schools, such as graduate schools within BU, to see differences between stress among undergraduate or graduate students. It would even be beneficial to compare liberal arts schools in the Boston-area with other college campuses to see if varies of study affect stress on campuses. Similarly, more research could be conducted analyzing stress on college campus in different regions. For example, are students in Boston more stressed than students in Los Angeles, Chicago, or Miami? Furthermore, a limitation of our study was that participants were mostly upperclassmen, thus it would be valuable to include underclassmen in the future.

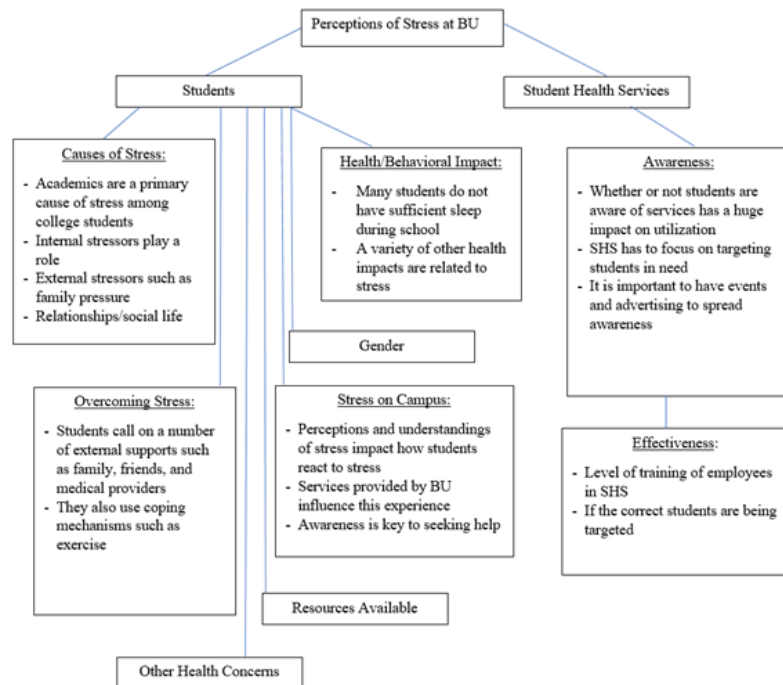
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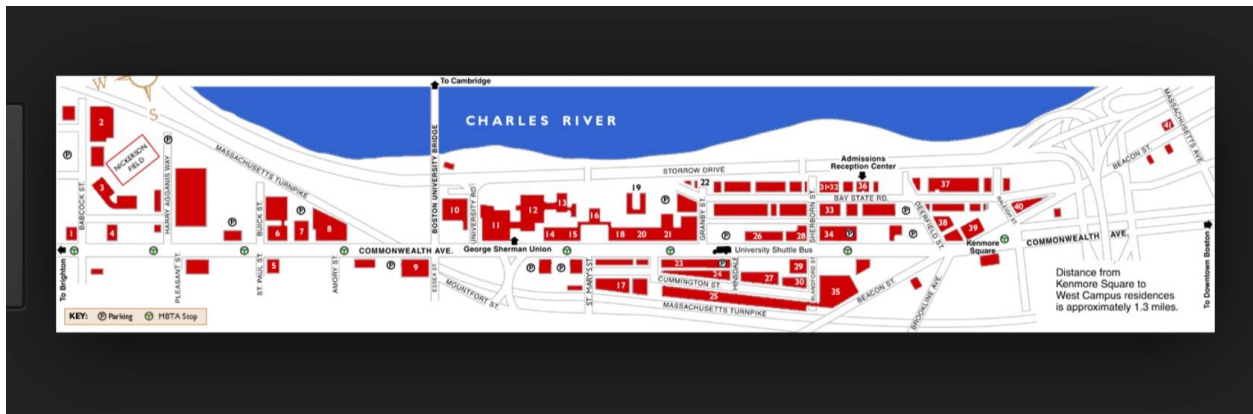
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Appendix:

Appendix A: Concept Map



Appendix B: Map Of Boston University's Charles River Campus



Appendix C: Code Book

Theme	Subthemes	Code	Description
Causes of Stress	Academics	Red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academics indicated as a major stressor Related to schoolwork and course

			load - Major/school
	Internal Stressors	Dark Blue	- Holding yourself to high standards - Thoughts about the future
	External Stressors	Dark Green	- Any non self-inhibited stressors - Family pressures, stigma, professors, jobs, etc.
	Relationships/social life	Yellow	- Worrying about family and friends or relationships
Health/Behavioral Impact	Overall health/sleep	Blue	- Changes in sleep schedule - Changes in mood - Eating patterns
Overcoming Stress	External Support Systems	Orange	- How participants help others when they encounter stress - How participants reach out to others or systems for support
	Coping Mechanisms	Pink	- How do students manage their stress? - What activities do they engage in to destress?
Stress on Campus	Awareness/understanding stress	Purple	- Knowledge of mental health and Boston University services - Impressions of what stress is - Perceptions of prevalence of stress
	Boston University Services	Green	- Knowledge of available services - Concerns over the current system - Suggestions for improvement

Appendix D: Sample Consent form:

Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today.

My name is _____ and I would like to talk to you about your experiences related to stress at Boston University. Specifically, the purpose of this research is to better understand how students and faculty perceive stress.

The interview should be less than an hour. I will be recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Although I will be taking some notes during the session, I can't possibly write fast enough to get it all down. Since we're recording, please be sure to speak up so that we don't miss your comments.

All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses will only be shared with research team members and we will ensure that any information we include in our report does not identify you as the respondent. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time.

Are there any questions about what I have just explained?

Are you willing to participate in this interview?

Interviewee Signature

Witness date (MM/DD/YYYY)

Legal guardian (if interviewee is under 18)

Appendix E: In-Depth Interview Topic Guide: Boston University students

1. Introduction
2. Semi-structured interview
 - a. What is stress in your opinion?
 - b. Do you feel you experience stress?
 - i. What are the primary sources for your stress?
 - ii. How frequently do you experience it?
 - iii. Explain a scenario when your stress had a significant impact on your life.
 - c. How do you cope with stress?
 - i. What stigmas have you faced?
 - d. How common so you think it is to experience stress as a student?
 - i. Can you explain an experience where you helped someone stressed, or witnessed someone else's stress?
 - e. Is there something you do that helps you when you're stressed? If so, how often do you do it/when was the last time?
 - f. Is there any stigma towards stress among your friends, family or peers?
 - g. If applicable, what are you responsible for that you feel is out of your means at times?
 - h. Do you believe that there is enough awareness about mental health on campus?
 - i. Do you feel that your college and university as a whole provides enough resources or mental health help?
 - i. How can Boston University better accommodate students with mental health issues?
 - ii. Have you ever utilized any of these resources? If so, can you please elaborate on that experience? Positive/negative?
 - j. How do you feel stress impacts other parts of your life/health?
 - i. Do you view it as a positive or negative aspect of your life/health?

Appendix F: In-Depth Interview Topic Guide: Student Health Worker

1. Introduction
2. Semi-structured interview
 - a. What is stress in your opinion?
 - b. How do you feel students experience stress?
 - i. What are the primary sources for student stress?
 - ii. How frequently do students experience it? Are there any specific times/patterns during the year you notice?
 - iii. Explain a scenario in which you've seen stress have a significant impact on a student's life.
 - b. How do students cope with stress?
 - i. What stigmas do you notice on the topic of stress?
 - c. How common so you think it is to experience stress as a student?
 - i. Can you explain an experience where you helped someone stressed, or witnessed someone else's stress?
 - d. Do you have any recommendations on techniques/ways to help students when they're stressed?
 - i. If so, how often should they practice these ways?
 - e. Are there any differences or similarities in stigma towards stress coming from students' friends, family or peers?
 - f. Have you seen students put responsibility on themselves that are out of their means? Please elaborate on any examples.
 - g. Do you believe that there is enough awareness about mental health on campus?
 - h. What resources are out there for students on campus in regards to mental health?
 - i. Do you feel that your college and university as a whole provides enough resources or mental health help?
 - k. Do you feel that students fully utilize these resources? If not, why?
 - i. How can Boston University better accommodate students with mental health issues? How process works
 - ii. What kind of feedback do you get from students on their experience using mental health resources on campus? Positive/negative?
 - l. How do you feel stress impacts parts of one's life/health?--stress impact on life college,
 - i. Do you view it as a positive or negative aspect of one's life/health?

Appendix G: Focus Group Discussion Topic Guide

Icebreaker: Each participant introduces him or herself and shares their major and year in school.

1. What is stress and how do you view it?
2. Do you feel you experience stress?
 - a. What are the primary sources for your stress?
 - b. How frequently do you experience it?
 - c. Explain your stress. How do you feel when you're stressed?
3. What are you responsible for that you feel is out of your means?
4. How do you cope with stress?
5. Is there something you do that helps you when you're you are feeling stressed?
6. At what moments in the day do you feel less stressed? And when do you feel more stressed?
7. How common do you think it is to experience stress?
 - a. Can you explain an experience where you helped someone stressed, or witnessed someone else's stress?

8. Is there any stigma towards stress among your friends, family and peers?
 - a. What stigmas have you faced?
9. Do you believe that there is enough awareness about Mental Health on campus?
10. Do you feel that your college and university as a whole provides enough resources for Mental health help?
 - a. How can Boston University better accommodate students with Mental Health issues?
11. How do you feel stress impacts other parts of your life/health?
 - a. Do you view it as a positive or negative aspect of your life/health?

Data Collection Summary
HS440 – Spring 2017

Group No.: 4

Group Members:

1. Faridat Ilupeju
2. Claire Belant
3. Fabia Federico
4. Sydney Williams
5. Hoda Yehia

Topic/Question(s):

- ❖ What are perceptions of stress at Boston University?
- ❖ What supports do students at Boston University use to address stress?

The Problem Statement:

Many students experience high levels of stress in college. Stress can be visible in its extreme when students transfer schools or change majors, but in general, it is not visible and can manifest itself in subtle and varied ways. Stress can impact sleep, lead to depression, and ongoing cases lead to increased levels of cortisol resulting in health complications such as weight gain, concentration impairment, and headaches. Due to the impact stress has on health, we aim to understand student and faculty perceptions on stress and the effectiveness of BU services.

The Purpose Statement:

This study is important because every student is affected by stress at some point in time during their experience at a university. By understanding perceptions of stress, we hope to understand the scope of the problem, and whether or not sufficient supports are available to students coping with stress. Our objective is to understand how prevalent stress is at Boston University and whether or not people recognize it as a problem that warrants intervention. Then by assessing factors that contribute to stress, we hope to understand the usage of services offered by BU. Through speaking to faculty as well as students, we will identify if there is a gap between services being offered and services being utilized. Our research site is limited to BU and our participants will all be BU students and faculty.

Choice of Methods Table:

Method	Reasons for Using/Not Using the Methods
Participant Observation	Performing participant observation will allow us to design questions for our interviews. It will also help us to gauge the scope of stress on campus.
In-Depth Interviews	We chose to do in-depth interviews to better understand how individuals perceive stress. It will also give us a chance to differentiate between professor and student perspectives.
Focus Group Discussions	In order obtain a wide range of perspectives, attitudes and feelings towards Mental Health at Boston University, we chose Focus Groups as one

	of our methods. Focus Groups will allow us to draw upon a diverse group of respondents which may not be as feasible in other methods.
Mapping	Mapping can be used to ask students and faculty members to illustrate where they go to cope with their stress and where faculty members direct students in need.
Photovoice	We concluded that this method would not be suitable for our study. There aren't many visuals to be observed relating to our topic.

Data Collection Summary

Theme	Codes	Color Code	Description
Causes of Stress	Academics	Red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academics indicated as a major stressor - Related to schoolwork and course load - Major/school
	Internal Stressors	Dark Blue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Holding yourself to high standards - Thoughts about the future
	External Stressors	Dark Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Any non self-inhibited stressors - Family pressures, professors, jobs, etc.
	Relationships/social life	Yellow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Worrying about family and friends or relationships
Health/Behavioral Impact	Overall health/sleep	Blue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changes in sleep schedule - Changes in mood - Eating patterns
Overcoming Stress	External Support Systems	Orange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How participants help others when they encounter stress - How participants reach out to others or systems for support
	Coping Mechanisms	Pink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do students manage their stress? - What activities do they engage in to destress?
Stress on Campus	Awareness/understanding stress	Purple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge of mental health and BU services - Impressions of what stress is - Perceptions of prevalence of stress

	BU Services	Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge of available services - Concerns over the current system - Suggestions for improvement
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Participant Observation

Summary

As a part of our experiment, we conducted one of our participant observation methods at the Health and Wellness Fair and one in the Warren Dining hall. In this setting, we were able to listen to a conversation by a group of young male students. The themes that emerged from their conversation was causes of their stress such as Academics, Internal and External factors, Health/Behavioral impacts, overcoming stress such as coping mechanisms, and Stress on campus such as BU services. The Health and Wellness Fair served as an example of an event that all BU students had access to that provides information regarding the available Mental Health services on campus. It provided insight into the ways in which Student Health Services, Wellness and Prevention Services and other groups on campus interact with students as far as answering questions and providing information about what is available. The themes that developed from a closer look at the event were Awareness/Understanding of Stress as far as available services and how to access them and understanding the various types of stress and how to manage them. There was also discussions and information provided on Coping Mechanisms including how to manage stress and the way it affects your overall health.

Health and Wellness Fair

- ❖ Held in the Warren Towers Media Room on March 20th from 5-8pm
- ❖ When I arrived there was between 40-60 students at the event not including those who were holding it
- ❖ There was a mix of both men and women in attendance and I was unable to differentiate between class level
- ❖ Advertised as a place to learn how to “Promote your mental health. Support those around you Access health resources on campus”
- ❖ Upon entering the event students were greeted by a student representative from Wellness and Prevention Services with a stamp card; visiting 5 booths and getting 5 stamps granted entry into a prize drawing at the end of the night
- ❖ There were snacks set up and some light music playing in the background
- ❖ There was an area to receive a complimentary massage to destress with a line of students waiting to participate
- ❖ People eagerly entered the event as they were greeted with friendly faces
- ❖ Most people entering the event were with at least one other person while some had two or three people with them
- ❖ There were 10 tables; Clearing the Air, Uplift, Love is Louder, Love Your Stripes, Zumba with Olga, Pitcher Pourfect, Terrier Talk, White Ribbon Week, Life Management with ERC and Look for the Good all of which were run by various clubs and service groups on campus
- ❖ The mood of the event was upbeat. Music was playing and students generally seemed excited to visit the different tables to ask questions, answer questions, win prizes and receive information on what services were available to them
- ❖ I was given on card that read “Tell Someone...BU Listens. Your Mental Health matters to us.” which included a list of hotlines to call including one for the 24 hour behavioral medicine.
- ❖ Wellness and Prevention Services handed out cards that listed types of stress, “Eustress (good stress) and Distress (can be bad for you)” as well as tips for recognizing when you are stressed (symptoms) and how to manage it (eat, sleep, exercise, relax, talking)

- ❖ Behavioral Medicine was discussing a program called “Terriers Connect” which focused on providing students on campus with an outlet for discussing mental health. Participation in the program is open to students, faculty and staff of BU.
- ❖ Students and faculty were invited and definitely gently urged for participation whether it be in walking up to a booth or in playing a game
- ❖ They were helpful in forming an understanding of unfamiliarity with mental health and the services available at BU
- ❖ Free prizes and easy activities seemed to encourage participation

Warren Towers Dining Hall

- ❖ Table of four male students conversing on March 19 at 7pm.
- ❖ One student from Questrom, one studying computer science.
 - Student 1: “I want to major in computer science, computer science majors make bank, but the course load is ridiculous, just listen to this course description, *reads course description for CS class,* triangulation? What the heck is triangulation!”
 - Student 2: “I just want to do well and get a good job.”
 - Student 3: “Have you seen what finance majors do? They literally just look at a big screen and look at the changes in the graphs and that's all they do, like what do business people even do at work? Do they just wake up, get some coffee and kiss their bosses behind? Who wants to work like that? Who wants to work 70 hours a week that's ridiculous.”
 - Student 4: “Yeah, and if I had to take Finance 101 again, I would literally fail, that class is excessively hard.”
 - Student 2: “This whole week was stressful, I'm glad I finally have a reason to take a break.”
 - Student 1: “I need to find a cheaper place to live, housing is this week for seniors.”
 - Student 4: “Oh ****! I forgot about housing.”
 - Student 3: “Okay, five bio courses versus five Questrom courses, which one is harder? Definitely the bio courses, those classes are impossible.”
 - Student 1: “Yeah I think the bio courses.”
 - Student 4: “Dude! How are you not worried for graduation?”
 - Student 2: “I don't know, I'm just going to work and get my Masters anyway.”
 - Student 4: “Honestly, I wish I could just go into the future and see what my life would be like and just live in wealth or go into the past and be a kid again. Life is not all about work. Humans are not men meant to sit in front of computer screens for 10 hours straight were not built like that. Humans are emetic, this is why so many people are stressed and depressed all the time.”
 - Student 3: “And BU does not care, they just want your money for you to leave.”
 - Student 4: “Yup, the world will move with or without you.”

Focus Group Discussion

Summary

In our experiment, we performed two focus groups. In the first focus group the primary theme was academics as a source of stress. This was expected due to our sample being of undergraduate students and our topic being stress at Boston University. We also saw themes of other internal and external stressors. The primary external stressors mentioned besides academics were finances, family pressures and expectations, as well as jobs.

Another important aspect of the first focus group was talking about coping with stress. This involved talking about external supports such as family and friends. A number of participants talked about the importance of having someone to talk to when they are stressed just to know that someone else understands. This, the participants reported, can lead to strengthened friendships and relationships. Participants also cope with stress in solitary ways. Some said that exercise is a very good outlet for the nervous energy that comes with stress. They also enjoyed doing yoga or other relaxing activities such as drinking tea. Some liked to eat and watch Netflix.

We also talked with participants about BU services and if they were aware of services on campus and what their impressions were of these services. Students overall could identify the location of Student Health Services, and were aware that BU offers mental health services. But overall students had heard negative reporting about fellow students' experiences. Also students reported not knowing when they should utilize these resources because they felt outreach wasn't reaching them in a way that made them feel connected.

Focus Group One - March 23, 2017 6:00 PM

Notes

- ❖ We began by handing out consent forms
- ❖ Then we started the mapping activity by having each participant circle where they go when they are feeling stressed and marking an 'X' on what locations they associate with high stress levels for themselves
- ❖ Many admitted that primary stress levels stem from school and/or their job
- ❖ They admit that constant stress is also based on expectation from family members
- ❖ Coping mechanisms:
 - Tea, gym, yoga, playing an instrument, talking with close friends (knowing you aren't going through it alone)
- ❖ Feel less stressed right when they wake up in the morning and feel more stressed when about to start work
- ❖ Stress is very common according to them
- ❖ There is good stress and bad stress (varying levels)
- ❖ A lot of times people just need someone to listen to their problems, one participant explained how she enjoys making dinner for a stressed-out friend to give them the opportunity to vent
- ❖ One male participant explained the stigma around males expressing their feelings about stress and how they oftentimes bottle up their emotions
 - Another participant felt that admitting that they are stressed might be viewed as a sign of weakness
- ❖ They say that they are aware that BU offers mental health services but are unsure of the specifics and have heard of negative experiences at the behavioral health center
- ❖ They had a 'to each his own' outlook on stress when asked about stress among colleges and majors and said that the amount of stress solely is dependent on the person
- ❖ Positive impacts of stress:
 - Acceptance of failure
 - Motivation
- ❖ At the end of it all, you understand how much you are capable of

Transcription

Claire: Hi everyone, thanks for coming, um to our focus group. so our focus group is sort of just focusing on stress and how people think about stress here at BU. So, we're just meeting with some students to talk about it. So before we get started we have consent forms for you guys to sign basically just saying that it's

okay for us to talk to you and to record the session. And you guys are welcome to leave at any moment during the recording if you feel uncomfortable or would like to leave.

Miyirem: Do you have a pen?

Claire: Does anyone else need a pen? Okay. (pause) So basically the goal of the conversations we're having is just to sort of understand how people deal with stress at BU, what sort of resources are available, and how it's impacting the students here and their health, so we have an exercise for you guys to start out with.

Hoda: So basically we're just gonna hand out this map of BU and, we just wanna see like if you guys can identify the health services, where it is on campus. Like where any type of support on campus is. You can just circle it.

Claire: Right, so if you could just mark the areas where you think there is help for... health services, or where you would go to get help, if you were dealing with stress. And then also you can mark areas you associate with high levels of stress.

Faridat: Put an 'x' where the high levels of stress are and circle where you would go to relieve that stress.

Miyirem: So wait, are we circling are we circling where we think there are services to relieve the stress or places we would go.

Sydney: maybe put like a star next to where the services would be.

Miyirem: okay

Participant 2: places you would go, like where would I

Claire: Yes, just you personally. Whatever places you would go. So that can be a personal thing. (pause while writing)

Josh: You said circle them right?

Claire: Yeah, circle the ones where you would go to help relieve stress and then you can put an x in an area that you associate with really high levels of stress. Sorry to have made that a little confusing.

(pause)

Hoda: maybe one more minute?

Claire: are we all set? So now what we can do is maybe go around and all introduce ourselves and if you want to say one of the areas you marked on your map and why. So, do you want to start?

Miyirem: Sure, I'm Miyirem and one of the places I marked was where I think my room is on the map.

Claire: okay.

Josh: I'm Josh and by the way, do you want where we go when we're really stressed or

Claire: it can be either one, just let us know why, like which one it is

Josh: I put where like, Mugar is and GSU

Claire: and were those stressful or

Josh: yeah, stressful

Blake: I'm Blake and I did the same as you, I marked where my dorm was and as somewhere I can de-stress, but also somewhere where there is stress.

Montana: I'm Montana, and I also marked where I think my room is on the map, it's not very clear. But um yeah, but also a place I can de-stress, but also a place that is often stressful.

(laughter)

Claire: Okay, we can introduce ourselves too. I'm Claire

Fabia: I'm Fabia

Sydney: I'm Sydney

Faridat: I'm Faridat

Hoda: I'm Hoda

Claire: So do you guys want to start with some questions?

Hoda: Yeah, so , just some general questions. So what is stress in your opinion? Anybody can shout an answer out.

(pause)

Claire: Or sort of what do you associate with stress?

Montana: Like a pressure to get something done. So stress is kind of, it's a, a lot of time it can be an external pressure, but a lot of times for me it's an internal pressure like I have to get this done and if I don't I feel bad and that often leads to like feelings of anxiety or stress. Like sweaty hands, or elevated heart rate, maybe you'll feel a little bit nervous about something at some point.

Hoda: any other thoughts?

Josh: It's like a... worrisome obligation if that makes sense.

Claire: Yeah.

Hoda: Okay, so next question. Do you feel you experience stress and like, what are the primary sources for you. Where does the stress stem from the most for you?

Miyirem: Schoolwork.

(laughter)

Miyirem: Yeah, mostly schoolwork. Um, sometimes it's job related, if I have to work and I know I have an assignment or a test due and I just have to go to my job. So sometimes job related, but mostly schoolwork.

Blake: I feel like for me it's just business. I feel like if it's schoolwork or with other things in life or the combination of the two. Like, when I'm busy and there's a lot of things to balance that's when I'm stressed.

Hoda: So often do you guys experience stress? Like, during the week? Or were you about to say something?

(laughter)

Montana: I can shout out for both if you like?

Claire: Go for it

Montana: So, I feel like there is a lot of pressure to do well on things, not just get them done, but to actually feel like I've accomplished something that is worth it and when there's too many things to do at once I'll feel stressed if I don't have enough time to put down for both. This can come from schoolwork, it can also come from doing research, so a lot of times I feel like if I have too many things I'm working with between two hundred and four hundred samples, right now, if I don't know where one thing is I might freak out because I'm like 'I don't know where that is, I need that back!' or, just little things like pulling all of the pieces together. And I would say I feel stressed pretty constantly at BU. I feel like there's not really a day that goes by that I don't (laughter) where I feel like I'm down off of the stress load.

Blake: I feel like you learn how to live with it and like, obviously I don't break down everyday because I'm stressed, but everyday I'm thinking oh I have this and this and this and this to do. But that's okay and I live with it, and then there are moments when I'm like this is a lot.

Miyirem: I think that for me there are like different levels of stress. There's the constant stress of all the things I have to get done, and there's so much of it. But then there's those times when, usually around midterms and finals, but sometimes randomly, in the week. Where there's just so much, and like the whole time like when I'm walking somewhere all I can think about is how stressed I am and how much I have to get done.

Hoda: So, some of you mentioned research stresses you out, schoolwork. Anything else that you feel, what else are you responsible for that you feel is out of your means? Anything else?

Josh: Expectations? (laughter) So like, everyone has, at least I do. Like family, or like, just people you care about basically.

Montana: I would agree with that. Thinking about family back home, and what's going on back home. Like my brother was having homesickness earlier this year and he's at college for his first time, and I couldn't really help him so that stressed me out because I felt like I couldn't reach him in order to talk to him or in order to actually get him to pay attention to me if I was talking to him. So I think that goes along with that well.

Hoda: How do you cope with stress?

Miyirem: Food and Netflix

(laughter)

Montana: Tea. Go to the gym, I run or do cardio or something that allows me to just escape and get out some energy that's sometimes just pent up. I also play an instrument, I don't know, that helps me.

Hoda: Is there any specific exercise, do you go to certain people when you feel stressed?

Josh: I can talk about it with people, but they're just like 'yeah that sucks.' Because, like, everyone goes through it so, I like to kind of just reflect. So just like write, or like, go on a run.

Montana: I'll go to my roommates, they're all kind of wonderful. Um, and I've been living with the same girl for four years, so we kind of just if we're stressed, we'll just come home from the day and be like 'I need to just get this off my chest' and we'll just go for it. And then the other one will really helps me to be able to say it out loud. She doesn't even have to respond, she can just say what she's stressed from so just kind of going back and forth like that allows me to just put it out there so someone else is hearing what I have to say, and also knowing that she can say that back to me makes me feel like I have a friend to lean on.

Blake: I would agree with that, just like knowing that someone else in your life is stressed too and is busy too and you're not the only that's alone. But at the same time I think that in classes, there are people sometimes who's stress can augment your own stress (laughter), but it definitely depends on the person and your relationship with them. I do the gym too, yoga.

Montana: Yoga's good.

Hoda: So what moments in the day do you feel less stressed?

Montana: Bedtime

(pause)

Montana: Actually, can I change that answer? I think when I first wake up in the day and my mind's still mostly happily asleep. That's when I feel the most quiet

Hoda: Or when do you feel the most stressed?

Blake: I feel like right before I start my work, it's like stress about stress, about work, about something. You know like until you get into it and then you're like this is manageable, or oh this is really difficult, but at least I'm working on it now and I'm making progress. Where as, before I start it it's like I'm stressed about that. I'm stressed about being stressed about that, or I'm stressed about that being difficult.

Hoda: How common do you think it is to experience stress? Like, just in general, or among college students, or talking about yourself? So how common do you think it is to experience stress?

Josh: I feel like it's very common, everybody stresses out, there's people who say there's good stress and there's bad stress. Like good stress is the stress that you can manage, so like, there's like levels to it I guess.

Montana: I would agree with that.

Hoda: Can you explain an experience where you helped someone with stress or where you witnessed someone with stress?

Josh: How do you help someone stress, like make it worse for them?

Claire: Help someone who was experiencing stress.

Hoda: Or witnessed it.

Miyirem: I think a lot of times people need, just someone to listen. And so I've definitely been there for friends who just like, had way too much going on and then they just like word vomited and just sobbed and it was like good for them in that sense. Um, and it also kind of elevated my stress but I didn't say anything. But, it's a lot of just listening I think, and not trying to say like it'll be okay, but a lot of like, I understand what you're going through, vent, that's what I'm here for.

Montana: Yeah, I think it's listening and sitting down and one of my favorite things to do if I have a friend that's stressed is just have them come over and I'll make them dinner so I'll know that like, they can just eat and talk and I'll just sit there and listen and I've helped, or at least I hope I've helped, just letting them have a meal off their mind and a friend by their side.

Faridat: I'll ask the next one, is there any stigma towards stress among your friends or family that you experience? Does anyone like, maybe, I guess like, show stigma toward you for being stressed, or is there any way they might treat you differently for the way you're experiencing stress?

Josh: Like, I find that often times, amongst my friends or just with their family members, they associate stress with weakness or just sensitivity. So I don't know if that makes sense, or like um, even I guess

among males there's like you're not supposed to be stressed out, you're a man. It's like, life is hard, so yeah.

Montana: I think one of the stigmas I see is similar, it's basically the same, it's if I'm stressed, it's a sign that I'm failing, or it's a sign that I'm weak, or it's a sign that I can't do it. But I think that there's a balance between being stressed and actually being able to manage something and having people not look at you like you're weaker for feeling the symptoms.

Faridat: Okay, do you believe that there is enough awareness about mental health on campus?

(pause)

Miyirem: I think my answer is a little biased just because I live with a girl who is very much, well I live with a bunch of girls who are very much are proponents for raising awareness for mental health, and trying to get rid of the stigma. So, for me I'm more aware of other people on campus just because I'm surrounded by people who constantly talk about it, or who make the note to point it out.

Montana: I'm not sure because I've had different experiences as I was summer staff for orientation, and through that training I saw that there were lots of opportunities on campus for health and mental health and many places to go to reach out. But I think before that I didn't really know that much, I didn't know that there were these things available. I had heard that behavioral services was there, but, I think all I had heard about behavioral services was people's bad experiences with it. And that's what I associated with it. So it's changed overtime.

Hoda: So you guys are saying that the resources are there, but not enough people know about it basically?

Miyirem: Or if they know about it, what you hear is not necessarily good. Because I don't know that much about the mental health services BU offers, in detail, but what I have heard of it, like personal experiences from people have been a lot of negative. I mean I don't know if it's because the positive experiences nobody talks about it, but I just hear a lot of negative and the only positive I usually hear from it is like through BU. And when they're trying to push for it.

Claire: And do you feel like the students as a whole are very aware about mental health? Or do you feel like it's not really talked about?

Montana: I feel like it's not talked about really, people say they're stressed, but nobody really asks deeper than that. No one really dives deeper than that so I feel like it's all very surface level so if you have a friend that is having an issue, and they're like oh I'm stressed, you're like oh I'm stressed too, I think.

While that may be true, I guess sometimes the mental health aspect may be lost.

Hoda: How can BU better accommodate students with mental health issues?

Blake: I feel like part of the issue is how do you know when you're stress is like, it would benefit from being helped by a professional. And like, how do you identify whether if you have like, I don't know what phrase you just used, but I think mental health issues. It's hard to know, like, I'm so stressed and upset about my schoolwork now, and this is something that would be helped by a professional, or this is something temporary, that I'm feeling because of this class in specific, and like, I am really stressed, but in the long term it's not going to be an issue. And you can google it, you can google like depression tests or things like that but usually it's like 'are you sleeping well' or like 'have you thought about killing yourself' and there's always ways to answer that you can exaggerate how you're feeling or not. So it's honestly hard to identify whether you're having an issue. Because I think that on campus I always see posters or hear about talks, so there are definitely resources, but to know whether you should be using that is confusing to me.

Claire: Okay, yeah.

Hoda: Do you have any suggestions for how BU specifically can reach out? Because people aren't like actively going to these talks, so what do you guys think in terms of reaching those people who don't usually tend to gravitate towards that?

Montana: I think, this might just be me, but I tend to respond better if things are more personal more or less. I think I would have a harder time going to watch a talk, or go out to like see widespread kind of media things because I feel like if I'm experiencing stress it's not something I really want to talk to, like maybe I would google something on the internet. But I think that when you're having a mental health issues, it's hard to reconcile with yourself that maybe you're having those issues with yourself and maybe

it's even harder to ask for help about those issues. So I feel like, I'm not, I would have to think a second about suggestions, but I think it's harder to make the call then if you're at SHS and a doctor says how are you feeling today, have you had any thoughts of suicide, have you had any stress issues, or if you're sitting with your adviser have the advisers ask seriously how are you feeling today. Are you experiencing these things, here are these different outlets you can go to to talk to people about that.

Hoda: Okay

Sydney: I have a question, so like, what colleges are you guys in? And what do you think of the stress levels like within your college compared to like, maybe the rest of BU, or maybe like your other friends that are in different schools?

Hoda: We can just go around

Miyirem: Okay, um, I'm in COM. And most of my friends are in science related majors, so I think it's hard to classify. I think it's hard to compare different levels of stress because science related course work is a different level of stress than COM related ones. Because I know a lot of my friends stress for labs or exams, where my stress is more geared towards papers or presentations or projects. And so it's not really easy to compare the two if that makes sense.

Josh: Yeah, so I'm in CAS but I'm a computer science major so I understand like, the academic stress. But I know people who share the same major as me, but I try not to like overlook stress the people from other colleges face because they can, they could be facing academic stress as well, but I mean, there are other types of stress. Like financial stress, or stress from like, personal relationships I guess. I don't know. But, what was the question again?

Claire: Yeah, that's good!

Josh: Um, yeah, so I guess it doesn't really... even like being at BU which is I guess, a relatively hard school, um, like, it's like to each his own. Everybody has like their own battles and stuff like that so it's kind of bias to say I'm stressed out more than you.

Blake: I'm an engineer, so I feel like in general, I do recognize that other people in my school are stressed, but I think like, given that I like math and I like science, I would be more stressed in a school like COM or Shaw, than I am in engineering. So I think it just depends on who you are.

Montana: I'm in CAS, as a science major and I think that it's hard to quantify stress, especially since I think a lot of stress is internal pressures I think that anybody can put enough internal pressure on themselves in order to be incredibly stressed out no matter what college you're in or what your major is.

Hoda: So last question.

Sydney: How do you feel stress impacts other parts of your life or health? Like, outside of school. Do you feel like you're still able to do the same things, do you feel like you maybe like miss out on things because of stress?

Faridat: Or do you like, gain weight or lose hair?

(laughter)

Sydney: Or does it make you more tired, or just like the way being stressed affects you.

Josh: I guess sometimes it's like sleep schedule. Like, sometimes I don't know, I fall asleep at like four in the morning, and have class at nine, and I just can't function the whole day. People will be like talking to me and I'm just like yeah (laughter). Social interactions.

Montana: Lack of sleep. Nights where you... weeks, months, where you only get five hours of sleep a night. Um, I get stress pains in my sides, lack of eating, sleeping... basically human functioning (laughter).

(pause)

Hoda: Do you guys feel like in any way it has a positive impact? Rather than negative, because so far we've been listening to negative, but, I don't know.

Josh: I guess like, it makes you more ah... acceptable to like, failure? Or like, just that sometimes life can be shitty. Pardon my French (laughter). Yeah, cause it's like, I feel like, I can't remember the first time I stressed out. I guess the first time stressing out and experiencing failure made me like, accept stress for what it is and like it's made me like, more of a, I guess a positive person. I mean even though this happened, I'm going to move on from this and like, move on.

Claire: Any other positive impacts that stress might have?

Montana: It makes me work harder, like if I am stressed out about something I'm going to do much better on it instead of just being, 'oh I guess this is do, I'll maybe put a pass at it.' I don't think I would be the student or the person I am today without the amount of stress I have endured at BU. I think that while it's probably not great for mental stability or (laughter) bodily functioning, I think that it has really allowed me to become someone I'm proud of as an academic and someone I'm proud of as a student or someone who wants to learn. I feel like it helps me focus and it gives me a drive to get things done.

Miyirem: Yeah, you know when I would talk to my mom and like, be stressed and she would tell me, you know, when you come through with it all you walk away a stronger person, and that's kind of what I've just repeated to myself when I'm really stressed. I'm just like, it's gonna be done soon and then you know you can do it.

Blake: It like, because it's such a challenge, you value it more at the end when you do well. Or even if you do poorly, like, you worked hard, or you fought the stress. And I think when you're able to go through stress with someone else like a classmate or a friend, that makes that bond stronger.

Montana: I feel like it just adds something. I was talking about this kind of same thing with a friend the other day and we were talking about it, you feel down for so long and then you finally get that moment where it pays off and that moment feels so much better than any of the pain you've put on yourself and I feel like it's almost like an adrenaline rush or a little high you get from actually accomplishing something after really pushing yourself to get it done.

Claire: Any sort of last thoughts? That was the end of our questions.

(pause)

Hoda: Okay

Claire: Thanks so much for coming you guys, we really appreciate it!

Faridat: You're welcome to take more donuts or

(laughter)

Focus Group Two - March 23, 2017 7:00 PM

Notes

- ❖ Began with the consent forms
- ❖ Proceeded with the mapping activity. We told all the participants to circle areas on the BU campus map where they go to relieve stress and place an 'X' on location that they associate with high levels of stress
- ❖ Most participants tended to associate their residence as a place where they go to relieve stress. Everybody X'ed Mugar Library and the GSU as stressful
- ❖ One participant said that to her, stress is related to anxiety which is hard to escape
 - Another said she associated stress with increased heart rate and panicking
 - One said that stress is a motivator to complete her work
 - One said that there is no such thing as good stress or bad stress - it is all bad and hard to escape
- ❖ Primary sources of stress are balancing school/work, thinking about the future (especially seniors), and personal stress
- ❖ Some admit that then they are stressed, they tend to put off their work which causes more stress
- ❖ Stress levels vary due to hectic lifestyles but are usually heightened on days where they have the most classes, homework assignments or work shifts
- ❖ One participants admitted to having panic attacks when she feel stressed - especially when thinking the same thought repeatedly
- ❖ For another, stress remains at the back of her mind and has no physical effects
- ❖ Stress stems from being in a new environment (job interviews, professional settings)
- ❖ Coping mechanisms:

- Sleep, taking walks, talking to family, distracting their minds from it, listening to music, exercise, watch TV
- ❖ Feel most stressed while going to bed thinking about everything that must be done in the upcoming days/weeks. Sundays since that is the day most people tend to leave their homework until.
- ❖ Nobody feels stressed midday since they are so busy with work and classes
- ❖ They believe stress is extremely common among college students due to juggling different things and the lack of routine
- ❖ Most tend to help other stressed people by simply talking to them and reminding them of their capabilities
- ❖ They admit the negative stigmas toward mental health issues but feel that you shouldn't feel ashamed to discuss these issues with close friends and family members
- ❖ They note that stress varies among majors and is dependent on the person and their capabilities
- ❖ One COM student says that her college is not very stressful and it is a calm and enjoyable environment
- ❖ One student says that many BU students don't know about the behavioral health services.
 - She says the problem is that they only allot you 5-8 appointments before they refer you to a different professional
- ❖ This is not good since the student has already formed a relationship with this specific person.

Transcription

Claire: Hey everyone thank you so much for coming um so this is just a focus group to talk a little bit about stress and perceptions of stress at BU so before we get started if you don't mind we um have just a little consent form. Do we have enough ?

Fabia, Sydney, Hoda, Faridat: There's some more over her.

Claire: Okay perfect um for you guys to sign and it's basically just saying the purpose of this study which is just to talk about stress and better understand that and also that it's okay for us to um do an audio recording so and just remember if at any time you'd like to step out you are more than welcome to, um yeah. We just want everyone to feel comfortable.

(laughter)

Claire: And when you are finished I'll just take them right here, thank you.

(not sure) : Okay wait this um may be a stupid question but am I the witness ?

Claire: Oh yeah

Katie: I'm sorry

Claire: No, you're fine. Thank you.

Claire: So we are going to start out with just sort of a little activity and what we have here is a map of campus and if what you could do is circle areas that you relate with um places you would go to sort of relieve stress and then you can put an X in places where you associate really high levels of stress. So I'm just going to pass these around...Here you go....

Shravya: Circle things that...

Claire: Where you go to relieve stress and then an X on areas that are high stress.

Katherine: So that's Stuvi ?

Claire: I can grab that for you

Antara: Oh wait I don't know the date

Claire: Oh don't worry about it

Antara: Okay then

Claire: Yeah you're fine. So what we're doing right here, this is just a map of campus and having people circle areas that they associate with relieving stress and where you might go and then putting an X in areas that you associate with high stress

Antara: Oh okay

Claire: And then if you guys could also just write your name and what college you're in at the top. Thank you.

Antara: So we circle only areas that relieve stress

Claire: Yes

Antara: Okay

Claire: Where you might go if you were feeling stressed to feel better.

(laughter)

Claire: Alright and then what we could maybe do is just sort of go around and you could introduce yourself and what school you're in and reference one of the spots you marked on your map and say why you marked that as stressful or stress relieving. Do you want to start?

Katie: Okay sure I'm Katie Connolly and I'm in the School of Education um I circled on St. Mary's Street because I live around South Campus and that's, I feel like I relieve stress at home with my roommates um and I put an X on Warren Towers because I do all my studying in the dining hall and it just makes me think about staying up late and doing assignments

Zayn: Alright I'm Zayn, I'm in Sargent and I circled my apartment as well in South um and I circled the esplanade because I sometimes go there and take walks there and then I X'd Mugar and the GSU um just because too many people

(laughter)

Zayn: Yeah I just feel like that heightens your stress but I do like...

Shravya: Okay um I'm Shravya, I'm in Questrom, I circled also around South because that's where our apartment is and it's just relaxing there and I circled the gym too um and I also put an X where Mugar is

Katherine: Um I'm Katherine, I'm in Comm, I did the same thing as Shravya, I circled FitRec you know because I think exercise is a really good stress reliever. Um and then my apartment area which is in South and then I put an X through Mugar because I can't sit there like I really don't that environment at all and so....

Antara: Hi I'm Antara, I'm in Sargent and I think I circled the FitRec couldn't tell the building but yeah and then I circled the GSU and I put an X in Myles and CAS

Claire: Okay. We can introduce ourselves also. I'm Claire.

Fabia: I'm Fabia

Sydney : I'm Sydney

Faridat: I'm Faridat

Hoda: I'm Hoda

Sydney: Okay so our first question is, what is stress and how do you view it ? Anyone can shout out an answer when their ready

Fabia: This is going to be like a discussion..

Claire: Yeah

Fabia: We're all gonna talk

Claire: So sort of what you think about when you think of stress

Katherine: Is everyone supposed to answer ? Or just like one person gives an answer ? Like do you want answers from every single person or no?

Claire: It doesn't have to be that formal but just if you have something that you'd like to contribute to a certain question than you are more than welcome to speak

Zayn: I associate stress with anxiety and for me if I'm like stressed about something I'm constantly thinking about it and I don't really know how to get out of that state so that's why I like go far a walk or something I don't know just find ways to de-stress which is hard to do sometimes but I'm the type of person who likes to do it myself, like I'll deal with my own stress rather than ask someone else for help or something like that

Katie: I feel like for me stress is really like um inhibiting like it doesn't like maybe for some people stress motivates them to like do their work or something but I feel like for me it just doesn't allow me to do anything and it's kind of paralyzing. I feel like I'm just thinking about stuff but not doing it um I also kind

of...I don't have anxiety but I also associate it with feelings of panic and increased heart rate and stuff (laughs)

Shravya: Yeah I'm the same way um I feel like my probably not the best way of dealing with stress but what I do the most is like putting off whatever it is that I have to do and avoiding whatever it is that's making me stress but I usually find that whenever I do it it's fine

Katherine: I would say I'm a little bit of the opposite like I'm one of those people where it's like if I'm stressed out I have to do it. Like its like just personal example, I had mono last semester and I was so stressed out about not being able to go to class and you know not being able to whatever. And you would think oh okay it all piles up it's too much but then I was so stressed out about potentially not doing well in a class so I like overexerted myself to finish it. But also I do have anxiety so it's a different thing because I will have a physical reaction like panic attacks and stuff so like that in turn is another thing where it's like okay if I just do or complete whatever it is that I am so stressed out about then like it will stop or go away.

Claire: Okay

Antara: Oh um I agree with what everybody said and um yeah I don't think stress is a good thing like I know how sometimes people say stress is good like there is good you stress and then like bad stress or something but I don't think like any of it is good cause like I don't know I just feel like in today's society like our lives are like so fast paced that it doesn't really make sense to have any kind of pressure because no matter how small it is I think like she said everything builds up like she said so it's hard to deal with.

Claire: Oh yeah

Sydney: Okay um, what are the primary sources of your stress ?

Shravya: For me it's just um having a lot of things to do at once like it's not like my one homework assignment is really really hard but it's just like balancing that with like work and an internship and different clubs and stuff like that and just like finding time to do everything is like the most stressful for me

Zayn: For me I think the primary source of my stress isn't really what's going on at the moment it's like what's going to happen in a couple months especially since I'm a senior so everything is kind of like up in air and everyone is asking me what are you doing so that. And I'm the type of person who is always thinking about the future so I guess that would be like more stressful . The classes I'm in right now I can usually deal with that pretty well

Claire: Okay

Katie: For me I feel like um there's like academic stress and like personal stress like I feel like my school stress is because I'm not a great student and I have problems with time management even though I'm like a junior so I just yeah everything will happen at once for me and in that moment I'm like ugh. And I feel like I deal with it it's just like putting it off more and I feel like that's just increasing the stress and then I also feel like I just feel like personal stress like um if other people around me or my roommates are like going through something I feel like that's stressful too..yeah

Sydney: Okay, how frequently would you say that you experience stress ?

Katherine: I think it varies like I'll go through a point where, at least, well not everyday but maybe a couple times a week where it's like oh you know I have this big assignment and I'm thinking about it and oh I'm stressed out or it's like oh I'm applying for this internship and I'm stressed out about if I'll hear back but it varies. Sometimes it is definitely more severe than others but I think a couple times a week and I think that goes for having a hectic life and being a student and stuff like that

Shravya: Yeah I agree. I think that for me it's like definitely really heightened usually throughout the week like Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday are like really busy for me so that's usually when I'm like really high stress but I always notice as soon as Thursday's over I'm like super chilled out and like fine so...

Sydney: When you feel stressed, what is that feeling like for you ? What is kind of like going through your mind, how do you feel ?

Katherine: Again I kind of think it depends on the severity level like speaking from personal experience I do have panic attacks so for me at least that's like a very physical reaction so like accelerated heart rate like me personally I feel like it's a weird thing but I feel like I can't swallow so then I will try like

compulsively trying to swallow and then whatever so it sucks but it doesn't usually last that long like it's a couple of minutes and then you sort of recenter yourself and you're more grounded. So then that's definitely a physical reaction but then like other times when it's not as severe it's just more like someone else mentioned just the consistent like thinking like my mind is always kind of focused on it you know racing like oh when am I gonna get this done, oh god. So you know just very prevalent um and maybe that kind of equates to your kind of like tossing and turning at night and you can't sleep because you're thinking of something and stuff like that. So yeah...

Katie: I definitely relate to like thinking the same thoughts over and over again because like that's what it is for me...

Zayn: Yeah me too. I think it's yeah, sometimes I feel like I have a headache or something because I'm like thinking a lot but I don't think it really affects me or my behavior or anything like that in any sense. It's just like frustrating having something at the back of your mind, um, but yeah..

Sydney: What are you responsible for...(clears throat)...what are you responsible for that you feel is out of your means that might contribute to your stress ?

Katherine: Like out of our control ?

Sydney: Yeah

Hoda: It could be like external factors, friends, family...I don't know. The other group was saying how like expectations and stuff like that.

Katie: I think for me like um I get so stressed out about things that are new and things that I don't feel that I'm good at and um so I feel like just stuff that anything that has to do with like professional or an interview like anything where I have to be professional or like induct myself into the job world and like really am not used to that and it feels out of my control because it feels like something I just don't really get the chance to practice or didn't really get any stepping stones into. So I feel like yeah I don't know, anything that's like a new environment where I feel like I'm expected to perform and I don't feel like I have the skills to perform

Katherine: I completely agree...

Zayn: Yeah me too.

Katherine: Yeah like in a professional setting it's like oh when I started a new internship or like dealing with like people where they are higher up than me like a professor student relationship or something I get really stressed out that like they don't like me and that like really bothers me. Or like shoot, I have to live up to these expectations like I have to do well or else they aren't going to like me so then I get really stressed yeah.

Sydney: How do you cope with stress ?

Shravya: I sleep

(laughter)

Zayn: No I can't sleep like if I'm stressed I'll like wake up sometimes in the middle of the night or I'll just wake up earlier than normal but yeah um I like to take walks, that's pretty relaxing for me. Or just doing things to take my mind off it like talking to family, um but I won't necessarily tell them that I'm stressed or anything it's just nice to not have to talk well I'm not talking to myself about it but it's like nice to not have to think about it with someone else. Yeah so yeah.

Katie: I usually talk it out with my roommates um or listen to music really loud

(laughter)

Katherine: Yeah exercise like running really helps

Antara: I don't do any of that I just watch tv

(laughter)

Sydney: At what moments in the day do you feel less stressed and when do you feel most stressed ?

Antara: I feel most stressed like morning and night. Yeah.

Zayn: Yeah I agree, I think before I sleep like when I'm in bed that's when I think about the next day or like what's going to happen the rest of the week or anything like that. Like just planning out the rest of my week or day. And when I wake up I don't think I really think about it that much but I don't know but I

guess I would think about it in the morning as well um midday I don't because I think it's just out of my mind the day is already going and I have other things going on

Shravya: Yeah I'm the same, I definitely feel like the most stressed at night or whenever I come home or before I go to bed because I feel like when I'm like busy during the day and like doing things and like at work or in class or whatever I don't even have time to think about what I'm stressed about but then like when I'm home that's kind of when I start thinking more about it

Katherine: I think Sunday like all day Sunday
(laughter)

Katherine: Sunday night too, thinking of the week ahead or Sunday you **leave all your homework until the last minute and it's just like the worst.**

(laughter)

Sydney: Um okay, how common do you think it is to experience stress ?

Shravya: Like very

Katherine: So common

Zayn: Especially at our age like in college because there is so many different things going on. **Academics,** family, friends, um... **future plans like all these expectations and pressures from outside sources and the pressure you put on yourself too.** So yeah...

Katie: I also think too that like lack of routine is really more stressful. And you said **juggling different things** I feel like when you are more stable and you go to work and you go home it's like a little bit better but when you're like thinking a lot

Zayn: Yeah

Sydney: Okay, can you explain an experience when you helped someone that was stressed or witness someone that was experiencing stress?...Or like more specifically what you do when you know someone is stressed, like how you kind of help them manage it if you have had experience with that

Zayn: Yeah that happened to me today actually. My cousin she is a doctor and she was like working nights at a new job this past few days and she called me today and she was like crying and super stressed, exhausted, um and she had like been through something at the hospital like with two patients and like miscommunication and stuff. And I didn't really know like how to help her because it was a lot of technical stuff and **I just did my best to like comfort her um let her know that she, cause she didn't really do anything wrong so I was just letting her know that um yeah that she did all that she could that was in her hands**

Sydney: Just to be there to kind of listen too right ?

Zayn: Yeah exactly

Sydney: Okay

Shravya: For me I can think of my mom um she doesn't really anymore but I remember when I was like living at home in high school and stuff she used to get like really stressed out sometimes whether it was about like her responsibilities for me or my dad or work or something um and I think just kind of knowing my mom and knowing what calms her down she's like super into like yoga and meditation and stuff like that um so I think knowing that helps me kind of be able to like calm her down if that makes sense cause like I know what gets her out of that state of mind and just like reminding her of that I think is really **helpful**

Zayn: Sometimes you feel like you don't really know what to say or do cause like if I was in like another situation cause I don't really talk to people if I'm stressed and I like to deal with that by myself so I'm like what am I supposed to say to her now because if I was in her shoes I probably wouldn't even be having this conversation unless it was like super serious. So it's just kind of... **I don't know it was hard today because I've never seen her cry before so it was intense, it was a challenge.** So yeah definitely listening and offering up words of support, things like that.

Claire: Yeah that always helps

Katie: I think it depends on the person. Faridat and I both tutor high schoolers and one of my high schoolers gets stressed all the time and I feel like she really needs like she's just so disorganized she really

needs like okay let's lay out everything you need to do and put it in a list. She just needs to see it out and see it like organized and that kind of helps.

Sydney: Okay um, do you guys feel that there is any stigmas towards stress within your friend group, your family and your peers and if so have you faced any of them directly when you are voicing your experiences with stress ?

Katherine: I think that there are a lot of negative stigmas and I experienced this in high school sort of people think that therapy is stupid or they think oh it doesn't help or therapy is for princesses like I've heard so many different things people say but really going and actually talking out issues is so beneficial even if you just need to vent and you feel like oh you know whatever it's different coming, talking to a professional who is trained in dealing with that compared to even talking to like a friend or family member in a lot of situations. Um but I think a lot of people want to say oh that's a sign of weakness or like that's frivolous or unnecessary, you don't need that. Um but in my own experience, that's just from friends but like family members are all super supportive of you know people that need to deal with it through professional route whether it be going to therapy or taking medication, there is not negative stigma. It's not like admitting a weakness or anything, it's just like so many, half of the population has anxiety like it's not a new thing. So I don't know

Claire: Right, yeah...

Shravya : Just kind of going off that I know um a lot of people who like I think of a couple family members who like don't necessarily negative towards things like therapy but they're just kind of like I don't want to someone else about it at all. Um I guess that's more like a personality thing where they'd rather keep it to people they know really well or just keep it to themselves.

Katherine: Yeah. Or I think it goes with anxiety or stress and depression too like some people think oh just don't be stressed out, just don't be sad, just don't be upset. If you really didn't want to be anxious, sad, panicked, sad, depressed, whatever, you could choose to be happy, you could choose to be positive. And like you can to a certain extent but when you have like anxiety, you know, bipolar, depression, any kind of mental health issue, there are times when you literally can not choose. It's like I can't choose not to have a panic attack you know what I mean. And I think some people think, oh they're anxious or depressed for no reason like why nothing's wrong, there life is great. But then it's literally like a chemical reaction in your brain like you can't shut it off. So I think that's just like another negative stigma too about mental health stuff in general.

Claire: Yeah for sure

Sydney: How do you think that your stress compares to others within your individual college ? And then, what do you think about stress within other colleges on campus ?

Hoda: You can go around and just say your school

Katie: I'm in the School of Education, um I'm not really sure. I think it varies a lot in SED, I think that I'm probably umm...I really don't know, I think I'm more stressed than some people and less stressed than others. Ummm, but I find that, well I find that people in my major like I'm in English education, I find that most of them are pretty stressed I would say so probably about the same as what I feel. Ummm and then other schools uh I don't know I always just assume that there are people who are doing like sciences are really like or engineering or something are really stressed ummm but I don't know I think most people honestly are pretty stressed.

Zayn: Yeah I agree, I'm in Sargent ummm...I'm trying to think I feel like because there are a lot of people in Sargent who are like pre-dental, pre-med so I feel like they are a lot more stressed than I am because I'm just Health Science and I'm not pre-med or anything but I feel like still um Health Science majors could still experience a lot of stress um just because the field is so broad so I don't know. There are a lot of different reasons why people would be stressed in like each major you could argue but in terms of other schools like Questrom when they're doing um Core or something like that or in general I guess. Um engineering um yeah those are the ones that come to mind but yeah. I agree I feel like it definitely varies.

Claire: Yeah

Shravya: So I'm in Questrom um and I would definitely again say it really varies just like kind of based on the type of person. There is like a ton of group work and if you're like the type of person who kind of

like slacks off and makes other people do it then you're probably not that high stressed. But then there's like people like me who like I like to make sure that everything gets done so that **when other people aren't pulling through it kind of adds to the stress.** Umm but I also feel like once you finish Core, you're kind of like cruising until graduation but it also that being said kind of depends on your major within Questrom so like I'm marketing and entrepreneurship and probably something else but if I were accounting or something I'd probably be a little more high stress but I think it definitely depends on the person

Katherine: **So I'm in COM, COM is so chill like I'm not gonna lie like COM across the board you got Film & TV, you got Journalism, you got PR, you got Advertising like it's not it's not an environment where people are super stressed out.** I mean some people because they are naturally like I'm going to do five internships and overload every semester, I totally get it but for the most part other than this one class I am taking this semester I love going. I do not feel stressed in that environment at all, it's really just like I want to learn, I want to be there and the classes are not ridiculously difficult and I'm in Journalism and maybe there is a crazy hard advertising class or something like that but you know Film & TV those kids *laughter* Not to knock it but like it's just so not stressful, it's just not a very high intensity environment. It's not, it's just literally not, so, I like it.

Antara: Yeah I'm in **Sargent uhhh so I used to be a Bio major before and I thought that like if I switched it would be like a lot better and I mean in some ways it is much better in the sense that it's manageable but I don't think my stress level has decreased any, so yeah.**

Sydney: Do you believe that there is enough awareness about mental health on campus ?

Katherine: **No, not at all. I really don't think there is like I think that BU, BU Student Health has a Behavioral Health Center right, a lot of people don't even know that like that's a program offered. Like I've been so surprised when I talk to people and they're like oh wow BU has a program for Behavioral Health** Like they literally don't know but the problem with BU Behavioral Health is you go and they only like grant you five appointments because of, or it's between five and eight appointments and then they recommend you to someone within the community. And like that's all well and good but I feel as though if BU and I understand there's 18,000 people that go to this school, it's a lot of people to cater to and I think they're just swamped like they can't handle it but at the same time if you establish a relationship with someone and you want to continue seeing them but then it's just like oh no sorry you're getting kicked off to someone in Cambridge or Brookline or wherever, they will help you find someone but I think they need more resources like they should you know like promote it through like events or you know news email blasts, whatever they want to do. I just I don't think that they one have the resources or two have the really the advocacy in place and maybe they do that on purpose because if more people knew about it more people would go and then they are like seriously overloaded but I don't think so

Claire: Okay

Zayn: Yeah like I don't even know where I would start like if I wanted to seek like if I wanted to talk to somebody I would have to like look that up. Like I know where **Student Health Services** is but like I don't know what other resources we have access to so I would definitely have to like look that up if I needed to

Claire: Okay

Shravya: Um yeah I agree with what's been said but also I remember pretty **distinctly my RA last year was like really really good about it and I think from what I've heard that a lot of RA's tend to be really good** about it like sending out emails before midterms or finals or something and just being like if you need to talk I'm available. I don't know if it was her specifically but she was really really good about it um yeah

Katie: **I think...I know that BU does like free screenings I think...like behavioral...depression screenings I think, I don't even know what kind of screenings. Like mental health screenings, um so I think that's like one good thing they do but I'm not entirely sure how it works, I've obviously never been but...**

Hoda: Yeah they sometimes have them in the GSU like I think last week I saw them

Antara: Yeah I mean I use them but like all they do is like diagnose you and refer you which is basically the same thing that Behavioral Medicine does and I've also used Behavioral Medicine and they suck so yeah...

Katherine: It's bad...

Antara: And like I don't even understand like if you're going to refer people you might as well refer them from the start like...

Katherine: From the start yeah...

Antara: Why would you like have you know like those limited appointments. And honestly those limited appointments like okay I don't know if I'm going off topic but like a lot of those people, I'm not sure if they are like licensed or not

(laughter)

Katherine: No seriously yeah...I don't think they are

Antara: I don't think they are ! Like it's like when people think about therapy it's like you need to talk to someone who is a professional like they will really help you think things through and like I've been like so I had three appointments and every single time that lady, I was just like what...

(laughter)

Antara: I just feel like they have no help at all and I could do her job, you know. Like no offense or anything but um they have some serious renovating to do.

Katherine: And it's unbelievable to me because BU with a school, like it has to be a billion dollar endowment, and like mental health on any college campus is so important. We're at the age where everyone is so stressed out, going through so many different types of changes, like and especially at a school of this size. That is an adjustment, in and of itself people feel lost, they feel alone, they don't know what to do, blah blah blah and like the fact that BU doesn't even foster a chance for students to really build a personal connection with someone on campus or it's like what if their insurance, like you can't pay to meet with someone like BU doesn't cover that. Well what if the student doesn't have insurance to pay for a therapy session at a place in Brookline? You're literally shit out of luck like you can't, it's bad, it's really bad.

Antara: Yeah I completely agree cause um it's like I mean I understand that like BU administration doesn't do their job but um at the same time I also feel like a lot of students even though they are struggling, it's like um we are struggling individually, we don't get together and say hey like this is something we want changed, we want more funding for you know mental health related stress related services like I don't hear a lot of people

Katherine: Talking about it...

Antara: So I feel like in terms of your question about awareness, I feel like there is a lot of awareness but there is not enough action...

Katherine: Yeah...

Antara: So um...

Sydney: Yeah that's actually our next question, so how do you think that BU can better accommodate students, like what do you think that BU or even the student body could do to better accommodate students with mental health issues ?

Antara: Like just ask us, um every student is different but at the same time it's like some of the stuff is a no brainer like you know like expand Behavioral Medicine, staff it with workers and you know there's just so many things they can do but I feel like there's no will power, no willingness to take that step so it's like no point in arguing anyway

Shravya: I completely agree, I think that with BU especially, BU is not a school that is super like school spirit like community, like it's just not like that and so I think at a school like that it's even more important to like cater to your students like specifically and especially with things like mental health and I think that BU seriously lacks in asking us. Like even just like sending out surveys like periodically, like is a really simple way to do it um and I don't even know if they've ever done that. They do it for like the dining hall...

(laughter)

Zayn: I know

Katie: And even then, there's like no change there !

Zayn: Exactly ! I feel like qualitative research is all about like having focus groups, in depth interviews, all that stuff and like you can get so much if you literally just talk to the students

Antara: Sorry I just wanted to add like one last thing, I think she kind of brought it up but I also think BU should expand accessibility. Cause um like I do, like I'm not trying to make a judgement on anyone but I do think that the majority of the students at this school can umm...they are pretty much well off but and that's why um students who are not well off, they often you know get ignored because like everyone just assumes oh you know you go to BU obviously you can afford it or like you wouldn't be there you know so I just feel like students they become marginalized if they don't have that accessibility especially I come from a state in which the insurance only covers in that state so like anytime...

Katherine: No that's literally what I'm saying

Antara: So I'll always have to pay these huge deductibles and it's just crazy, I might as well buy Massachusetts insurance but I mean it's like they need to tell us this stuff like before we come here, you know.

Katherine: And now that Obamacare is done for. No like literally no joke everyone is like your copay when you go to place, a therapist's office or a doctor's office anything, the copays are going to be so high now. Its terrifying...yeah its like gonna be this whole thing but no literally exactly what I'm saying. Like I don't even think they really consider students that are in different situations like that or there's not enough being done

Sydney: How do you guys feel that stress impacts other parts of your life/health?

Shravya: I think for me like if it gets bad enough um I can get to the point where I almost feel sick even if I'm not. I'm just so stressed and like drained that I feel like really really sick. And I think also if it's bad enough it kind of affects the way I interact with my friends or family umm I'm sure this happens to a lot of people but I tend to get like really grumpy or just like not in the mood to talk to people and it just kind of comes off the wrong way.

Antara: Yeah I think that stress from one part of your life kind of just spills into the others. Like if you're stressed about academics it will spill into your social life as well so it's like everything's connected like I don't know just like the whole general stress

Katie: I also find that when I'm stressed, I like to eat like really really bad food (laughter)

Katie: Um and I think that that just makes me all those things, lowers my energy, just makes me more tired, and I just I feel bloated and gross umm...

Sydney: Okay and just as a final question, do you guys view it as a positive? Are there any positive aspects of stress in your life

Shravya: For me sometimes I feel like it kinda just like motivates me to get whatever I need to get done because I know once I do I'll feel a million times better, I think that that's usually the case because most of the time I'm just stressed about assignments or whatever but like again if it's something more serious than usually not

Katie: I think the only thing with stress is...oh I'm sorry did I cut you off?

Zayn: Oh no no... *laughter*

Katie: Uhhh I feel like stress is like a sign that I care about it, that I care about something. And I think that's good because sometimes I just really don't care at all and I should be stressed about this but I'm not um yeah I feel like it at least proves to myself like okay like I want to do well and I want to be successful in this

Hoda: Um, any concluding thoughts?

pause

Hoda: Okay well thank you all for coming.

Claire: Yeah thank you guys so much, we really appreciate it! It was great to hear all your ideas

Faridat: You are welcome to take more donuts, or more munchkins...

In-depth Interviews

Summary

We conducted three in-depth interviews in person with a Student Health Ambassador and two students with opposing academic backgrounds. The fourth interview was conducted with a former Boston University student, who recently withdrew due to stress. When asked, all participants recognized that stress was very prominent on BU's campus. Most of their stress comes from academics or taking on too much at one time. Some coping mechanisms revealed were engaging in a hobby, exercising, or simply taking a nap. Most of the students have heard of BU's mental health services but had no personal experience with it but have only heard negative comments about it. The only one who had actually utilized BU's services was the former student.

It was interesting since the Student Health Ambassador talked about tons of ways that BU tried to help students cope with their stress and depression, but when these programs were brought up to the former BU student, he was surprised since these options were never presented or offered to him. Some of the main criticisms of BU's services were the lack of appointments allotted to a student and the fact that there is no professional psychiatrist on site, resulting in only referrals made by the Behavioral Health workers. This was an issue for most students since it is uncertain that one's particular insurance plan will cover these appointments. Many, including the Student Health Ambassador, agreed that much more needs to be done to better the Behavioral Health Services. For Example, everyone said that their office should be expanded and better staffed.

Student Health Ambassador - March 27, 2017, 4:20 PM

Notes

- ❖ Student health ambassadors work as the liaison between students and student health services
 - Start conversations about sexual health, mental health, taking care of yourself, alcohol, outreach education
 - 930 Commonwealth Avenue is the Wellness and Prevention Services Office
- ❖ Stress is the feeling of being overwhelmed to the point where you feel like you can't complete certain activities
 - Uncomfortable
 - Daunted by activities
 - Stress can be physical or mental and it is hard to ignore
- ❖ BU is a competitive environment which makes it stressful
 - Saw the most extreme stress levels while taking general chemistry freshman year
 - People weren't sleeping - stressed about going to office hours, doing homework, etc.
 - Freshman year many didn't know how to battle stress
 - Stayed at the library until it closes
 - Drinking
- ❖ Academics is the number one stressor for her, but relationships are a big one too
 - Roommate relationships, financial stress romantic relationships, pressure from parents to succeed
- ❖ International students tend to not have the same conversations about mental health as some American students
- ❖ Finals are the most stressful time throughout the semester and Sundays are one of the more stressful days of the week
- ❖ She had a friend who was a student at BU for 3 years and eventually she was unable to manage her time and couldn't handle all her schoolwork. Her sleep schedule was crazy. She also had stress about money and maintaining a job. She has now taken a leave of absence
 - She enrolled in a program called NATEO that helps students on a leave of absence with time management skills and just overall skills to get back into a regular semester course load.

- ❖ She sees many students at the gym, which is great. And she also notes that BU is a very big campus which forces students to walk around which is great but unfortunately, she says that many students would still resort to alcohol or drugs to destress
 - She loves when students reach out to her or other friends to cope with their stress
- ❖ She says that many students probably don't want to admit how stressed they are
 - No matter how much we bring the topic to light, she believes there is still a stigma related to stress in college students
 - Students tend to take on any task even when they are unsure if they can handle it
- ❖ Student stress of very common on campus
- ❖ New program called Stress Buddy which is a workshop conducted in groups which talks about sleep scheduled, coffee consumption, healthy eating, exercising, social support
 - She recommends trying to set a bedtime for at least 5 days of the week, and the same with working out and healthy eating habits
- ❖ The more you discuss your stress, the better it will get
- ❖ She said that many faculty members in their experience have been accepting of stress however, she has also heard of many instances where that was not the case
- ❖ Students tend to overlook themselves a lot - they are always looking to bump up their resume
- ❖ She does not believe that there is enough awareness about mental health on campus
 - She has seen it grow over the past four years but she still feel it isn't broadcasted enough
 - We need to put these resources and start these conversations during orientations freshman year
- ❖ Behavioral medicine received a bad reputation due to the lack of funds and resources but they have made a lot of changes in the past couple of years
 - People wait a long time to get an appointment but not they can get a 15-minute appointment within one to two days
 - If you need short-term care they can help you at BU
 - If you need long-term care, they will set you up with a long-term resource
- ❖ Center for Psychiatric Rehab
- ❖ Education Resource Center
- ❖ Marsh Chapel for those who want spiritual guidance
- ❖ Social support groups
- ❖ There are a lot of resources on campus but they are not as easily accessible as they should be
 - Students don't know about them and if they do, sometimes they take a while to set up
 - They are building more additions for Student Health Services
 - She believes there should be more peer student support groups since it is easier to talk to a peer rather than a faculty member
- ❖ She thinks students do not fully utilize the resources due to all the 'hoops' you have to go through with appointments, phone calls, emails, travelling
- ❖ College is time where everyone is trying to figure out their life goals but you are also learning how to manage things
 - Stress can be motivating but it can also have negative impacts
 - If you don't work on handling your stress now, it will only get worse when you enter the real world

Transcription

Hoda: Thank you first off for coming, so basically the goal of our study is to figure out students' perceptions of stress, so specifically you're a student health worker, so figuring out what you see in students in terms of how they deal with, how they cope with stress, and if BU, on campus, provides the right resources for students and what you can see improvement in or what's already here on campus, if

you can go into detail on that. So before we start, can you just sign the consent form. Just read through it and if you have questions just let us know.

Hoda: So describe a little bit about your role and what you do as a student health ambassador.

Participant: So student health ambassadors work as the liaison between student health services and the student body. So that means we run events on campus to start discussions about safer sex, safer drinking, about stress management, mental health, wellness in general, to really make students realize [that] even if you're swamped with schoolwork, you're swamped with everything else that comes with being a college student, there's still ways you can take care of yourself. And if you feel you are having trouble taking care of yourself, there are resources here to help you. So we do a lot of outreach, education, advocacy, and then work with students on a variety of topics.

Hoda: You guys are at 930?

Participant: Yup, we are at 930 Commonwealth, wellness and prevention services office. So it's a really great position and it gives us perspective.

Hoda: So what is stress in your opinion? Kind of a general question.

Participant: So I guess I would describe stress as the feeling of being overwhelmed, and obviously you can be overwhelmed by a variety of things, but just feeling as though you aren't able to do things as best as you wish you could. Maybe that's feeling you don't have the time to dedicate to something. You see that a task is very daunting, you don't feel prepared, you're uncomfortable in whatever situation and you can't stop thinking about whatever the issue is. So it's kind of all of that wrapped up into one. So obviously it changes on what kind of stress. It could be a physical stress, a mental stress, and it's hard to ignore, no matter what kind of stress.

Hoda: In your experience, how do students experience stress? Like what do you see in terms of how they deal with it?

Participant: Yeah, so BU is definitely a competitive environment. All the students here got into BU because they tried hard, they're competitive, and they want to do well, so that also makes it a stressful environment. I first saw stress to an extreme when I was taking gen chem my freshman year, and I would just watch the students around me just crumble. I could see students scrambling all of the time, trying to figure out when can I go to office hours, when can I get a C, how am I going to dedicate all this time, how am I going to finish Aleks: like constant. Cutting their sleep, start seeing people physically, bags under their eyes. And at that point I think a lot of us didn't know how to battle stress because we had just gotten to the school. And so I saw a couple things happen, maybe some students would completely disconnect from their newfound friends, isolate. Some students would stay in the library for as long as it's open, others would turn to drinking as a way to have a release of their stress.

Hoda: So you would say the primary sources of student stress, at least what you've seen are school-related? Or have you seen other external factors?

Participant: So I would say school, academics is the number one stressor that I've encountered, but I also see that relationship issues can be a trouble—whether that's trouble with a roommate, or romantic relationship. Financial pressure is another big stressor. BU is obviously expensive, living in Boston is also really expensive as well. The pressure from parents, I know a lot of students have a lot of pressure from their parents to succeed here. And also a lot of students, specifically international students don't have the same kind of open conversation about mental health that maybe some other students have. And having a mental health issue is considered weak and so that could be a stressor as well.

Hoda: How frequently do students experience it? Do you see certain patterns during the week, during the year?

Participant: I would say a lot of students could see this as finals period is a huge part of stress. People are cutting their sleep, and really trying to scramble to to the end to have the grades that they are looking for. In terms of other periods of stress during the week, that's something that I particularly noticed about one day of the week being more stressful. I know some students do cram on Sundays but in terms of week-wise, I haven't really noticed anything, but definitely semester wise I can see it.

Hoda: So you've described how you saw stress during gen chem, freshman year, so maybe now as a student health ambassador, can you describe a certain scenario, where you've seen stress have a significant impact on a student's life?

Participant: Yeah, so a friend of mine has been a friend of mine for three years and as time went on, she was no longer able to manage her time and so it started around sophomore year, she was having trouble doing her work, so she went and tried to get help. It just wasn't clicking for her, it just continued where she would go to sleep at 1, sleep for two hours, wake up for two hours to do homework, go to sleep for an hour, wake up to do homework, and just a cycle like that, where if you keep going you're going to crash. And so the stress was overwhelming, she would break down in class, she would ask for extensions, she just couldn't get the work in, so ultimately after last semester she had to take a leave of absence to try to handle all of the stresses that come with being a college student, being far from home, managing money, managing a job. In that sense, I've seen someone deteriorate which can be hard to watch, especially if you can help that much. But she's actually been able to join a program called Natayo here at BU that allows students to integrate back into a college environment. Talk about self-care, time management, study groups, and support one another, it's not just for BU students it's for other students [also]. She's been trying to figure out a way to manage stress, and be prepared to go to school next semester.

Hoda: In what ways do you see students cope with stress, any certain strategies they use?

Participant: Yeah, I see a couple of things, some of the good things, exercising that's a huge way to cope with stress. Certain times in the gym, it's absolutely packed so it's great to see students are exercising. Who knows if they are avoiding schoolwork by exercising but they're dealing with stress so that's a really good thing to see. One thing about BU's campus in general is that it's so long, students are forced to walk around so much, which is a great thing to do. You can see lots of people in the dining hall, being social, eating healthy food. Being social, to not get stuck in a hole. But I also see students that drink to manage stress and who party and we obviously try to stay away from that, but students still engage. But there are a lot of areas of support students can go to for stress in general, or if they're having an issue with alcohol or drugs. I've also seen people reach out. Reach out to me, reach out to friends, so that's something I've seen helpful as well.

Hoda: What stigmas do you notice on the topic of stress?

Participant: Yeah, so. Would say a lot of students feel like they can't let people see how stressed they are, Honestly I do that, and so if someone asks, be like 'Oh yeah I'm great', meanwhile you're drowning in a ten page paper. And so I think regardless of how far we've come in these last couple of years, it's still a topic people are scared to really talk about. And so there's still definitely a stigma associated with stress and how stressed college students really are. It becomes a hiding game. Hiding what's going on, not really saying 'I've overbooked myself', telling people 'no', just saying 'yup I can do it, whatever you need I can help'. That's something I've definitely noticed in this campus, it's hard to say no, you don't want to say no but sometimes you just have to.

And I think a lot of that stigma stems from the pressure to succeed, that's a really stigma pressure here.

Hoda: So would you say it's pretty common to experience stress here as a student here at BU?

Participant: Yeah I would definitely say yes. Yes, a lot of stress.

Hoda: Do you have any recommendations any sort of ways to help students when they're stressed. You mentioned being social, anything else you wanted to add.

Participant: at the Wellness office, we've actually had this program in the past, and we'll be revamping it soon, but its one **that the student health ambassadors actually facilitate called health buddies. And we focus on a variety of topics, we do this workshop with different student groups, different sororities, different clubs, FY101 classes. We talk about a couple of important key areas. We talk about the importance of sleep, getting enough sleep, but not too much sleep, the importance of no drinking coffee not later than 8 hours before you go to sleep. What's a productive environment not doing schoolwork in your bed, your bed only for sleep. About nutrition, health eatings, is key to stress management, exercising, importance of exercise, being able to reach out** to friends, and also being there to support one another.

Hoda: and like how often should they practice these ways do you think?

Participant: I mean like as regularly as you can **the body really likes having a rhythm and a schedule and so as much as you can practice these techniques of trying to practice the same out every night trying to go to bed on time and waking up on time and trying to eat healthy every day and keep walking keep active that's like that's obviously something you want to do every day but it's not like that unfortunately it's not I was going to happen so maybe if you can set up a time for like five hours or days like that that they could try to do and maybe you could just start small try integrating these 10 weeks couple days a week until you can get it into their schedule and the same thing with working out if you are able to start working out consistently at the two week mark it will become part of your habit and would be easier to maintain he just got to get through those first two week.**

Hoda: right um okay do you think there any differences and similarities of stigma towards stress from students friends family appears like the feel there's differences in those things?

Participant: Yeah I would say I can differ **depending on like where you're from maybe your background and times of like your upbringing whether or not you talked about stress when you were younger if you have older siblings that could be really helpful because you can learn a little bit more about the way your sibling might feel and to not get to this point like OK my older brother was able to handle this he did this like some advice also the way peers look at it I think it's because you are in an opera conversation which is good there still a lot more that needs to be done but the more you talk about it it's going to get better not just having that I have seen that faculty members are pretty accepting of asking for extensions and things like that in my experience I've had a lot of faculty members who are really supportive and I will ask if something is going on are you having a trouble with stress I have heard of situations where that's not the case so I know that definitely happens as well I say people are really strict about deadlines and things like that.**

Hoda: um have you seen Seun has put responsibility on themselves that are out of there means so like examples of that like something that is more than they're capable of?

Participant: Yeah I've seen students overbooked themselves a lot I think that's a big thing and it's hard for them to say no **I think that a lot of students will just take that on and agreed to lot of things and then they realize only thing that they can cut to make this successful is their sleep so they're sleeping like 34 hours a night trying to manage whatever they're doing and honestly I do that I take naps way too much because there's so much pressure to be the best and to bump up your resume as much as possible and to something that's taking their leadership role that you really don't have a time for him and I've seen that in the people around me and I myself am.**

Hoda: um do you believe that there is enough awareness about mental health on campus?

Participant: **I do not believe there's enough awareness about mental health on campus I think that I've seen a grow over the past four years at the same time it still seems like it's a little bit of a whisper like it's not something that students talk about is that I really like there are certain resources on campus but like people don't know about their areas to go and wait to just talk to someone it's just not really broadcasted**

and that's why I think what really needs to happen is we need to push these resources and conversations as soon as students get to college and they can do it during orientation weekend and that's when you can start these conversations because it gets to a point where you are second semester sophomore and you're just hearing of these resources and you're in a crisis and it's something that could've been helping earlier

Hoda: I mean this something you mentioned earlier about stress buddies?

Participant: Yeah

Hoda: so what other resources are available for students are dealing with mental health?

Participant: Yeah so obviously there is behavioral medicine which is part of student health services so they received a bad rap over the last couple years due to a lack of funds and resources but they have made a lot of changes over the last couple years the main issue is that people feel as though they have to wait a long time to get an appointment and so the process has turned around a lot what do you call you can get an intake appointment between 1 to 2 days and that's good and your schedule an intake appointment is 15 to 20 minutes and during the intake appointment that faculty the staff member will evaluate what type of services you need so if you need short term care or long term care if you need short-term care you can see it BU but if you need long-term care don't have to refer you out because I just can't hold 16,000 students there so they'll send you to a reefer clinic and they will go with you so you can get set up with an outside resource and so a lot of people want to get something right away which is totally understandable to start handling whatever you need to but it's just not possible um some type of other resources are the Center for anxiety and related disorders, and that's down in Kenmore except be related insurance and that's geared towards a private practice type environment and they do a lot of studies down there so sometimes students can do studies on there for free and be paid to do it so that's a possibility also the center for psychiatric rehab which there's more on psychiatric issues if you're looking for stress management about school there's an educational resource center they have tutors there they have the writing center I have a language center marsh chapel is helpful for people who are looking for spiritual guidance and different areas for conversation there's coffee and conversation where students open up a conversation about whatever topic it might be that week that actually was a really interesting session I attended last semester when I talk to him at the house on BU's campus they did a coffee and conversation which was pretty cool and so yeah that's a lot of different things out there there are some student groups for social support activities and you can just go and talk to people what is it with you.

Hoda: um okay do you, so do you feel that there are enough resources on campus and there's just not enough people who are utilizing it?

Participant: Um I would actually say it's a mix of both

Hoda: okay

Participant: There are a lot of resources on campus but they're not as easily accessible as they should be and so are a lot of students don't know about them and if they do know about them they can be hard to get everything set up and start seeing someone or something like that in terms of either enough resources I also I think that that's an area of improvement they are building a lot more additions for student health services and 930 Commonwealth Ave. they have a lot going on over there and they're getting their offices which is great but I still think there should be more resources maybe a lot more along the lines like of like a more structured social support group A peer support group a student support group of students who are kind of trained to be supportive obviously not counselors but trained and willing to talk to students because they can be hard to speak to an adult rather than speaking to a peer yeah so I think there should be more resources that are between seeing a professional and being on your own so being right in the middle

Hoda: um so kinda going off that, do you feel that students fully utilize these resources and if not then why?

Participant: I don't feel like the students for the utilize these resources and I think that's because it's not super easy as I hoped that you have to go through and times of making sure you have insurance and coverage for whatever you need and making appointments and phone calls sending out emails traveling just a lot of things you need to do when in reality just making that decision to go is huge and that's like the first that and that might be really difficult so then realizing that and realizing oh my gosh I have this huge

checkless I have to do all the things I have to do before even meeting someone and then the meetings in the later you know and then you been fighting through all this for like a month and I just think The process of beginning like seeing someone or getting treatment or whether it be just taking long and I think that's a major roadblock

Hoda: so like in that way Hackley better accommodate students in mental health issues or to go to the resources?

Participant: I think that they improved in becoming more clear but I still think they need to be really explicit about how the process works and maybe talk to students that first week of school to encourage them to like get familiar with the behavioral medicine website or get familiar with student health services maybe have faculty from student health services and faculty members to come to students to know what's going on so they can put a face to the office so they don't think it's like this evil place like what is it what if they saw the people who work there and made it more of a one-on-one connection and made it feel welcome I think that would be big and also just talking about it so many people just don't know about the Center for Exide he related disorder I don't know about the scent of psychiatric rehab like what is that so maybe they can also talk to students about it and just be a little bit more open about what's out there and then giving clear guidelines of what you need to do and also talking about past units experiences because there's so many expenses that come off as really negative less than positive maybe if they have like I don't know I have a student health and Bassett or an Abbasid her is like people were willing to talk about their past experiences about their own personal experiences and I something that's really difficult to do but like sinners who are willing to like talk The process of going to behavioral medicine what I did for them and they're like thoughts on it

Hoda: so like what kind of feedback do you get from them or from students like to know what kind of feedback you get from students?

Participant: Yeah so um, like our programs we get pretty positive feedback from all of our workshops the meeting that we contact with with it I actually had to give him to me and ask me like hey I know you guys work for behavioral medicine i've had such a negative experience in the past I wouldn't feel comfortable sending a friend there can you tell me like why they're so bad and it's like OK and so I've encountered a handful of people asking me questions like that which is hard because I'm not an expert and I can't fully speak for the changes but at the same time I am comfortable in telling them that things have changed so much and you're always gonna find people with negative experiences things are going as best as you want them to but it's really worth giving it another chance they have a new staff members their new staffing for specific purposes we're gonna make this journey a lot easier I will try to support the students were bringing up these type of questions because maybe it is their friend movies actually them and they're saying is there friend I don't know so just trying to be as kind and straightforward as possible but I totally understand where you're coming from I don't feel the same way let's try to move forward and try again or if you want to try to go off and I can refer you to a place of campus and not use a behavioral medicine at all. So they have been a few Bad ones but from what I hear things have been improving people have been having bad experiences things are changing but I do think that it's going to take some time to change these perceptions.

Hoda: ok um so two more questions how do you feel stress and packs one's life or health in general?

Participant: It has a huge impact on call should I say I think that college is a time where you're at trying to figure out your life what you like and you don't like what you want to do and in some ways stress can be helpful and motivating you to do things or to do your best in class but also this is a time are you trying to learn how to manage things like solidifying time management skills vocational skills and is just gonna be really negative towards those things and especially to like if you don't if you're not learning specific stress management techniques by the time you get into the real world maybe you don't have any solid techniques and you just keep doing these things for the rest of your life

Hoda: so what are the positive aspects of stress are there negatives and positives ?

Participant: Yeah, yeah there's two types of stress one being the negative type of stress and one being the motivating type of stress which is good like you need that to keep yourself going but the negative just I can really, Hurt your body in times of health because of the course on your hormones if you need to heart

issues and bad skin and inability to do exercising and headaches so it's hard to find that balance but there is a good stress and bad stress and I think that college is a place where both are there and you just have to figure out how to balance each one

Hoda: yeah that's it for questions

Participant: All right that's it

Hoda: thank you so much

Participant: Awesome yeah hope that was helpful

Hoda: yes it was very much

Participant: I always get nervous whenever I record something

Pre-Med Student - March 31, 2017 5:30 PM

Notes

- ❖ Stress is when you're frustrated and feel as if the problems you have are out of your hands.
 - Maybe you don't have the proper resources to handle it
 - A general feeling of tension
- ❖ He definitely feels that he experiences stress
 - As a physics major on the pre-med track, minoring in chemistry, biology and mechanical engineering he feels that course load causes him self-imposed stress but it's rewarding since he genuinely enjoys the classes he takes.
- ❖ Sometimes he feels that at the end of the day, there isn't enough time in the day to get everything done
- ❖ Academics plays the biggest role in his stress
 - He experiences it at least once a week. There is always a time where he sits down and has a moment where he realizes how much stuff he has to do and feels a bit overwhelmed
- ❖ Although he feels stressed frequently, he doesn't view it in a negative light
 - 'You-stress' is positive stress that motivates him to get stuff done
 - He feels that he is good with managing his stress, so no matter how overwhelmed he feels, he knows he can overcome it
 - He doesn't allow it to escalate into depression or a bigger problem
- ❖ He grew up in a community that had a very competitive school system. During his senior year of high school, one student didn't get into any college and he ended up taking his own life.
 - This was an eye-opening example of how stress can have a huge impact on a person
 - In the short term, something might be stressful, but in the long run, it only one small thing
 - It forced him to look at the big picture so that he doesn't sweat the small stuff
- ❖ He sees his friends stressed very frequently, so he doesn't hesitate to offer for them to hang out over the weekend to just relax
- ❖ He copes with stress by having a hobby - for him, it is photography.
 - Sometimes he ends up forgetting why he was stressed out in the first place
 - Since he is on the E-board for the photography club, he feels fortunate that he actually has a set time each week where he can forget about all his schoolwork and responsibilities
- ❖ Student stress at BU is very common
 - He didn't realize how common stress, depression and anxiety was among a student population before coming to BU.
- ❖ He doesn't feel there is a stigma about stress among peers
- ❖ With his parents, he can tell them when he is having a rough time but he doesn't because he doesn't want them to worry.

- ❖ He doesn't view stress as an externally-imposed feeling. Everything that makes him stressed, he has done to/for himself.
- ❖ He has never had any first-hand experience with BU's mental health services. But, with friends he has seen his friends get extremely overwhelmed and leave the university altogether.
 - He hears his friends complaining that BU doesn't offer them the help that they need.
 - In general, he thinks many are dissatisfied with BU's services.
- ❖ He came to college knowing that the workload would be rigorous, so he felt prepared for the stress that comes along with it.

Transcription

Fabia: Thank you for participating in this study. I already discussed what this is going to be about - your information will not be published. It will only be shared with my professor and classmates. So, do you have any questions?

Student: No, let's do this.

Fabia: What is stress in your opinion?

Student: Stress...um...right now I'm inclined to give you a medical definition, just because I'm pre-med but I think I'm going to opt for a more general thing. I think it's just when you're frustrated, I think it's when you feel as if a problem that you have in front of you is out of your hands or maybe you don't have the proper resources to handle that problem. And, I guess it's just the general feeling of uneasiness and tension that you feel.

Fabia: Do you feel that you experience stress?

Student: That would be an understatement. I guess, I think I put it on myself sometimes. I am a pre-med physics major with a minor in chemistry, biology and mechanical engineering. So, I guess part of it, I can't even blame anyone but those things do give me stress - the classes and the coursework that I have. Um... On top of that, I volunteer on the weekends and I also am the president of two clubs so that keeps me very occupied. So, sometimes I feel that at the end of the day that I don't have enough time to get everything done and that causes me a lot of stress.

Fabia: Okay, so, you mentioned some academics factors. Is that the primary source of your stress?

Student: I would say yeah, for my life, yes. Academics plays the biggest role in giving me stress.

Fabia: How frequently do you think you experience stress?

Student: I would say...at least once a week. There is always a stressful moment where I am like, "Okay, I have a lot of things to do and I'm not sure how I'm going to figure it out." So, I would say at least once a week that I have one of those moments.

Fabia: Can you tell me about a time when your stress has had a significant impact on your life?

Student: Hmm...

Fabia: And if you need to go back to a questions, we can do that too.

Student: So, I guess before I answer your question, I might have to add one that although I feel stressed quite a lot, I don't think that...like...I see it in a negative way all the time. Sometimes stress can be a good thing. You know. I think in psychology you learn about "You-stress" which is, like, positive stress. It pushes you to kind of get stuff done instead of procrastinating. So, sometimes I do feel like I have a lot of stress, but at the same time, over the years, I've gotten pretty good at managing it so even though in the moment I might feel as if I'm overwhelmed, deep down, I am sure that I can handle it. I am sure that I can pull through this. So, a lot of the times, the stress that I do have, doesn't amount to a bigger even of me being, for instance, going through depression or something like that might happen for somebody else. I'm able to handle it head-on, at its roots, so it doesn't escalate into a bigger problem. What was the questions again that I was supposed to answer?

Fabia: Just explain a scenario

Student: A scenario in which I would feel stressed?

Fabia: When stress has had a significant on your life.

Student: Umm...I don't know if there is a specific instance where my own stress had a big impact on my life. But I can talk about something else that might be a little related. For me, I grew up in a neighborhood that really pushed education. That's one of the reasons that my family moved to Short Hills, New Jersey. The school system there is ranked number 1 in the state and it's very, very competitive. Um...and my senior year was quite stressful. I was applying to schools at that time and I remember everybody was getting their acceptances and such, and we had a student that didn't get into any schools. And, he ended up taking his own life. I remember just a week before prom, we were going to a funeral and it is just such an eye-opening example of how much the stress that had maybe originated by the school system of the workload that we were given in classes could impact a person. And, I think that moment really opened my eyes as to, "yeah, you know, in the short term this might seem like a stressful episode and I might seem like I have a lot to do, and it might give me problems, but in the long run, it is just one little thing." It opened my eyes in terms of stepping back and taking a bigger picture on any type of situation. It taught me how to do that so that I don't get stressed out in the future about small things like that.

Fabia: So, after having that experience, when you see a friend or classmate who is really stressed, does that kind of motivate you to go out of your way to help them or do you keep to yourself?

Student: I have a lot of friends that are doing big things with their lives and they are studying hard and their workload is maybe even more than mine and I often see them stressed out and I never hesitate to go up to them and say, "Hey, do you maybe want to go out this weekend and just talk and relax and unwind?" I think all of us from time to time need that and it help having someone looking out for us.

Fabia: How do you personally cope with stress?

Student: How do I cope with stress? ... I think I have a lot of ways, but it definitely helps to have an outlet - a hobby of some sort. For me, it has always been photography. I know when I get very stressed out, I will just go out, grab my camera, and just take shots. And that often ends up allowing me to unwind and relax and I end up forgetting completely why I was stressed in the first place.

Fabia: So, how common do you think it is to experience stress as a student at BU?

Student: Very. Very common. When I came to college, I didn't realize how prominent stress and all of its related impacts (depressions, anxiety) how prominent it is among our student population. I thought maybe every once in a while, you will meet a person who has some type of lifestyle that will experience a lot of stress. But I think it's something that pretty much every BU student goes through. And, that's just, through my own observations but I've met a lot of people and it just seems to be the trend. Um... So I guess that's one of the reason why I said it's nice having someone to look out for us when we are stressed out because I'm sure all of us are going through it.

Fabia: You mentioned that you use photography as an outlet to relieve your stress. When was the last time that you did that?

Student: Wednesday night. So, I'm on the E-board for the Photography Club, so I end up getting to do photography at least once a week just because we do workshops with people. That is usually my time, Wednesday night, I get to unwind and forget about all the assignments I have due. It's not a lot since Thursday's are my busy days when everything is due, so just for a couple of hours on Wednesday nights I just get to completely unwind and forget about all of that. And it helps. It really does.

Fabia: Is there any stigma towards stress among your friends, family or peer that you might feel like, "Oh, maybe I don't want to tell my parents about how stressed I am because of what they will think?"

Student: Yes, so I guess I could start with peers. I don't think there is any stigma against stress among peers since we are all in the same boat. It's not unusual for one of us to come out and say, "Hey, I'm really having a stressful week." And that's a pretty normal thing and more often than not, the other friend will come to your aid. As with my family, I don't think there's much of a stigma because I know everybody doesn't have the same type of relationship with their parents, but I feel like I can tell my parents that I am having a rough time and they will be completely caring. But, the reason that I don't tell them is because they will be too caring and get worried about me. So, I don't think that constitutes stigma, but it definitely is one of the reasons I hesitate to tell my parents if I'm stressed.

Fabia: So, since you mentioned that your stress relates mostly to academics, what do you feel that you are responsible for that might be out of your means at times?

Student: I don't understand the question.

Fabia: So, do you think that your professors assign too much work or you don't have enough time since your classes end too late and you don't have enough time to do your homework at night...

Student: I generally don't think that stress is externally-imposed. I'm pretty sure it is self-imposed. Like I said, a lot the things I do are for me. I enjoy learning all these different things but at the same time, they come with work. I'm currently taking classes that I don't need for extra credits or my major, but I'm just taking them for me. But at the same time, I know that those extra courses have a lot of work and they stress me out. So, I can't blame anyone or assign any blame to any institution, but I think any type of stress that I do have, for me, it is self-imposed.

Fabia: Do you feel that your college. So you're in CAS...and university as a whole provides enough resources for mental health?

Student: Um...I would say that firsthand, I don't have enough experience with that. The good side of my personality is that I'm pretty optimistic about things. So, when I do get stressed out, I usually have a good perspective on it and I usually am smiling about it and I know that in the end, it will work out. I have a lot of friends, unfortunately, where that's not the case. I had a friend that was a chemistry major here at BU, and he and I were taking intensive organic chemistry together. This was my sophomore year. and it got the point where the workload in that class and all its associated frustrations, came to kind of this, apex, where he realized that he just has too much on his plate and he had to leave BU. and I have a lot of friends that go through similar things. although, like I said, I don't have first-hand experience with BU's health system or the Behavioral Health services they provide, I have heard my friends complaining about it a lot that they don't get the adequate help that they need - whether it's scheduling appointments with Behavioral Health or it's just talking to a psychologist. Maybe the treatment options are often straight to medications rather than some type of talk therapy. So, in general, I feel like a lot of people are dissatisfied.

Fabia: So, you personally have never utilized any of these resources. How do you think BU could better accommodate students then?

Student: I think that it will take a lot of investigation. I don't know if that's the right word, but a lot of inquiry, I guess, into what students are asking for. I guess projects like these where you interview people, you get a feel for what they need. That will allow them to better structure their program. At this moment, it seems as if it's not doing the best that it could do. So I guess what Behavioral Health needs to do is maybe have focus groups of their own and bring in people and ask students what they want out of the program and what changes need to be made because again, at its current state, it's not doing its best.

Fabia: Do you feel as if your stress impact other parts of your life or your health ever?

Student: Yeah, yeah. I think that, like, the biggest thing for me is just sleep. there might be times where I'm getting 8 hours of sleep and it's the adequate amount but because I have something on my mind, I'm tossing and turning in bed and I don't fall asleep for 2 hours or I wake up feeling restless. So, what I have in my mind is not allowing me to fully relax when I need to relax. So again, that stress is pouring into my physical health. So yeah, it's definitely affecting it.

Fabia: I think you already touched on this, but do you view your stress as having a positive or a negative impact on your life?

Student: Um... Again, I do have a positive outlook on life. And I'm an optimistic person I would say, in general. So, when I do feel stressed out, I usually end up feeling as if I know I can handle this. I think part of this is also my past experience, since I went to such a competitive high school, I know what type of work to expect in college. And, I kind of prepared me first-hand for what I was going to experience here. Part of it is that, but another part is my mentality and outlook on things is such that I think about the positives so I don't get bogged down with the negatives. So, my stress inadvertently ends up being positive things that pushes me to achieve my goals instead of something that I'm constantly circulating and thinking about leading me to have negative thoughts or a behavioral health problem. So, it's a positive things in general.

Fabia: Okay, that's it. Thank you for participating in my study!

Student: Anytime.

Notes

- ❖ Stress is not being able to function due to their mind being preoccupied with so many different things
- ❖ Experiences stress regularly mainly due to school work
 - A few weeks ago, he had a few extensive papers due but he ended up spilling a drink on his laptop
 - He felt that his professors would be understanding of the situation, but he didn't feel fully comfortable approaching them. Instead, he called his mom and she helped him get a new laptop.
 - This was more stressful for him since it happened at the end of a week where he already had a lot of stuff going on.
- ❖ Sleep is a primary coping mechanism
 - He tries to avoid stress by setting certain break points for himself to stop working and take a nap to get some rest.
 - After a certain time, he feels like he just can't be very productive
- ❖ He believes that students at BU are always stressed, but more so during midterms and finals. He doesn't feel like he sees too much stress in other COM students, but since COM is mainly papers, he already knows that people are probably busy with that.
- ❖ He feels the most stressed about long-term assignments and admits that it mainly due to his poor time management skills. When he has these long-term assignments, it is usually all that he can think about.
- ❖ He said that some people are capable of procrastinating and pulling all nighters but he isn't.
- ❖ If he sees a friend in the same class as he is, he likes to talk to them about the assignment because he thinks that talking about high-stress projects can actually help calm him and the other person down
 - He always tries to help classmates who are stressed - if working on a similar assignment, he likes to offer ideas that might help push them in the right direction
- ❖ He talks to his parents and friends frequently about stress and doesn't see it as a sign of weakness since he thinks everyone is stressed so there shouldn't be any type of stigma attached to it.
- ❖ He doesn't think that professors assign anything that is out of his means, it is more a problem of time management if there are assignments due on the same day, etc.
- ❖ He thinks there are a lot of things advertised at BU about mental health awareness
 - However, he didn't know where one would go if they were about to have a mental breakdown on campus
 - He admits that if he really needed help, he would just turn to his parents
- ❖ He feels that the professors in COM are very accepting of stressed out students. Many of his professors hold office hours right after class, so if you really have to talk to them about an issue, you can easily address it right when class is dismissed.
 - He doesn't think COM advertises many mental health and wellness programs.
 - He thinks that if he needed mental health assistance on campus, he could always ask a professor where he should go.
- ❖ He would say a key way to better mental health services would be to advertise more and expand their services by hiring more people or changing the program's infrastructure.
- ❖ Stress impacts his personal relationships - when feeling stressed, he doesn't have as much fun when going out with friends, or he might not talk to his family as much
- ❖ He thinks stress can be a good thing for motivational purposes, but for him it is usually negative since he is bad at coping with his stress.

Transcription

Fabia: So, let's get started! Can you just introduce yourself for me?

Student: My name is ****, I'm studying Film & TV in COM and am graduating in 2018.

Fabia: Okay, so what is stress in your opinion?

Student: Umm... stress is just not being able to... I just think it's a culmination of a lot of different things affecting a person and inhibiting them from being able to function. They can't do certain things just because their mind can't focus since they're so preoccupied with so many different things.

Fabia: Do you feel that you experience stress?

Student: Oh, yeah. Yes.

Fabia: Regularly?

Student: Yes, very regularly.

Fabia: What are the primary sources of your stress?

Student: School, without a doubt. I get very stressed about work.

Fabia: Can you just explain a scenario when your stress has had a significant impact on your life. Like, you weren't able to concentrate, you had to go home, something like that.

Student: Yes, actually a few weeks ago, I had two really long important papers due on a Monday and I started working on Friday and did a lot of work for them, but on the Saturday, I spilled all over my computer and my keyboard didn't work before I had these two big assignments to do. So, I freaked out and called my mom and it was probably the closest thing I've ever had to a mental breakdown. I was just so stressed because I had so much other work the week before and I just knew how much stuff I had to do the following week and then I didn't have a computer no top of that. I ended up typing everything on those slow computers at Mugar.

Fabia: It's funny, I actually like those computers because I feel that they help me focus more on my work!

Student: No, I definitely felt that I actually sat down and thoroughly completed all my work too!! It just took me a long time to sign on and type everything on those computers. But yeah, that was probably my most recent...it was probably the closest I've gotten to an actual stress mental breakdown.

Fabia: Do you feel like in that situation, your professors weren't going to be understanding in your situation?

Student: Well, I still had enough time. Thankfully, for one of my papers, I uploaded it to Google Docs right before I spilled stuff on my computer, so that one was saved. But, I'm sure if I emailed them and explained what happened and how I was losing my mind then they probably would've, yeah, understood.

Fabia: So, you said that you experience stress recently, so how do you cope with that?

Student: I try to get a lot of sleep. I try to set points when I'm going to stop working, like at midnight for example and I will sleep after that. After a certain time, I just feel that I can't do any work. Even if I have to wake up earlier the next day to finish something, that's better for me than staying up later.

Fabia: How common do you think it is to experience stress as a student at BU, in particular, in your college?

Student: Definitely around midterms and finals, without a doubt. And then probably, a couple other time throughout the year where they just have a bunch of assignments piled on for a week.

Fabia: Since you experience stress recently, how about your peers? Do your friends also feel the same way as you do, and if they do, how have you witnessed it and maybe even attempted to help them with their stress?

Student: umm...I definitely notice that other people do get stressed out. But I feel like, for me especially, I get really stressed out with long-term projects. I think I don't space everything out efficiently like I should. It ends up getting really late and it stresses me out and it's all I can think about. But I feel like everyone handles stress differently. Like, some people can pull an all-nighter the night before a paper is due and just crank it out but I definitely can't do that. I kind of forgot what the question was (laughs)

Fabia: Your peers. So if you see your friend really stressed out, do you ever do anything to help them?

Student: Yes. Especially if they are in the same class as me and we have the same assignment due and they're stressed, I try to talk to them and see how far they've completed it. If they're farther than me,

maybe I'll ask for some help, but if they haven't started, I always like to give advice and ideas to steer them in the right direction to help ease their stress.

Fabia: When you are feeling stressed, do you feel comfortable going to someone like a friend or family member and talking about it? Sometimes people associate stress with a stigma - like they might appear weak if they admit to their stress. Do you feel that or do you feel comfortable?

Student: No, I talk to my parents a lot about it and my friends, too. I feel like I'm comfortable being like, "I'm so stressed out. I can't do anything because I have so much work."

Fabia: (laughs) and they're very comforting to you?

Student: Yeah, because I feel like everyone gets stressed. It's not, like, I don't understand why there is a stigma attached to it.

Fabia: For some people, it's a cultural thing.

Student: Yeah, I definitely see that.

Fabia: So, since you said that a lot of your stress is associated with school...

Student: Yes...

Fabia: Do you feel that there is anything you're responsible for that is out of our means?

Student: Um...I don't think so. Other than if there is a day where 3 different professors assigned big projects due all on the same day. That's definitely a huge stressor.

Fabia: So, for you, it was more an issue of time management.

Student: Yeah, it's definitely time management that's my problem. And instead of actually doing work, I get stressed about having to start and do the work.

Fabia: (laughs) you stress before there's stress to stress about!

Student: Yes, I stress about being stressed. (Laughs)

Fabia: Me too. Um... So, BU as a whole - do you feel there is enough awareness about mental health on campus.

Student: Yes, I think so. I feel like there are a lot of things advertised to go to that place down...in Kenmore, right? Is that where they do it?

Fabia: in Kenmore, they have the Center for Anxiety and Related Disorders, but the main place where they deal with mental health screening is at Student Health, the Behavioral Medicine Center.

Student: No, I didn't really know that (laughs).

Fabia: (laughs) Okay, so there is kind of an awareness about mental health on campus, just not completely.

Student: Yeah.

Fabia: So, if you're really stressed and about to have a mental breakdown, do you know who you could do to?

Student: I would probably just call my mom or dad first.

Fabia: Me too, okay. So, just speaking of your school, so COM, do you feel that they provide enough resources for mental health help? Do you also feel that the professors are very accepting?

Student: Yeah, they definitely are. Most of my professors have office hours right after their class so if you are really stressed or have questions, you can go to them right after the class and they are really open to meeting with you outside of class. But I don't know if COM specifically, if they have any resources.

Fabia: No, like they wouldn't have a program, but do they advertise it? For example, in Sargent, the health school, you always see flyers about health and wellness.

Student: I don't think so, there is one bulletin board in the COM Lounge but I'm not sure.

Fabia: So, there might be, but you're not positive.

Student: I'm sure that there is somewhere. Or, like, if I really was trying to find some resources, I'm sure I could ask a teacher and they could definitely tell me.

Fabia: How can BU better accommodate students with mental health issues? I don't know if you know, but a lot of people that have been to Behavioral Health, they complain how they only give you about 2 appointments before sending you off somewhere but some people don't have insurance to cover that. So, that's not really working, so I'm asking if there is anything else that BU could do to help the stress of their students.

Student: I guess, just develop their center more and definitely advertise more about the services they offer. I don't really know the whole process of how Behavioral Health works so I don't feel confident answering that question.

Fabia: Since you said that you experience stress regularly, do you feel that it impacts other parts of your life? So you feel academic stress mostly, but does that impact your relationships with your friends and family?

Student: Yes, I think if I have a big assignment due and I choose to go out or do something, I am not able to devote myself completely to having a good time since I'll be focused on how I have to wake up early and do something. Or, I'll think, "Maybe I should be doing this".

Fabia: Do you think stress is a positive or negative aspect of your life? Some people look at it as a motivator and they like to be stress while some look at it as the opposite.

Student: I do think it can be a good thing. I mean, if you don't have any responsibilities to do anything, that's just boring. For me, it's usually a negative thing just because I'm do bad at handling my stress.

Fabia: Okay, then that's it! Thank you for participating in this study, ****!

Former BU Student - April 9, 2017 8:30 PM

Notes

- ❖ This student went to Boston University and withdrew due to personal mental health issues.
- ❖ He believes that stress is dependent on the context.
- ❖ His stress is more internal and comes up when thinking about the future.
 - When he attended BU, his main source of stress was academics.
 - Getting good grades, maintaining scholarship, etc.
- ❖ Had a very bad experience with BU's Behavioral Health Services
 - Met with one woman for about 10 minutes and she said he was depressed and told him to seek a psychiatrist in the area
 - When he told her about his plans to leave BU, she didn't seem too willing to help. She didn't offer any support services or anything like that.
 - He recommends that they hire more staff and they should have an onsite psychiatrist.
- ❖ He didn't like the culture at BU
 - He felt that aside from people being very competitive academically, there are a lot of very wealthy people who made him feel like he was constantly being judged
- ❖ He felt that the competitive nature took the fun out of learning
- ❖ The classes were so big so it was hard to get to know your professors and classmates.

Transcript

Fabia: Okay, so thank you for participating in this study.

Student: You're very welcome.

Fabia: Thanks. So you already know mostly what this study is going to be about. I'm just going to ask you a couple questions about your experiences of stress as a student and then your experience at BU using their mental health services. Okay? Are you ready?

Student: Yes, I'm ready.

Fabia: Okay, so, can you just define stress in your opinion. What is it to you?

Student: Oh my.. I don't know.. all right.. so. Basically I think of stress just making you preoccupied with something. I feel like there is a scale to it, if that makes sense. Like, I mean, I can be stressed because I'm late to the dining hall or I can be stressed because my parents passed away. So I feel like stress can depend on the context, in a way.

Fabia: Mhm.

Student: Does that make sense? Is that a definition of stress?

Fabia: It's good!

Student: Okay.

Fabia: So, you personally, do you feel as if you experience stress?

Student: Yes. Everybody experiences stress.

Fabia: And what are the primary sources for you stress?

Student: Primary sources?

Fabia: Mhm!

Student: Umm. Like what am I doing with my life? And why am I here, that sort of thing. it's more existential stress.

Fabia: Is it stress about the future?

Student: Exactly. The future. What am I going to be doing or why am I studying at UConn. Things like that.

Fabia: So, you would say that your stress is more internal rather than related to your family, academics, stuff like that?

Student: Yeah, I think it's more internal, definitely.

Fabia: Okay!

Student: I think it depends. In the past, it was more external like when I was at BU, for example. Before I left and quit, it was much more related to academics and it was just too much. It was that and I also was worried of getting kicked out of school, or not being able to have a scholarship if I didn't get a high enough GPA or something.

Fabia: So, then I guess I should ask you, when you were at BU, how frequently did you experience stress?

Student: All the time.

Fabia: And now, how frequently?

Student: 0% of the time. (laughs) I'm kidding.

Fabia: So you would still say 0% academically...

Student: I experience less now.

Fabia: Good! Good for you!

Student: Yes, I'm very happy (laughs)

Fabia: So, can you just explain a scenario when your stress has had a significant impact on your life.

Student: One time, last year, I had a breakdown where I was like "What am I doing?", "I hate BU". I remember that specific day, I skipped chemistry lab and went home to Connecticut and never came back.

Fabia: Oh, it was when you were taking intensive organic chemistry, right?

Student: Yeah, I just quit. I just left. (laughs) Does that count as a significant impact on my life or should I say when I quit school?

Fabia: Yeah, no, that's pretty significant (laughs). Since you had that type of major academic stress at BU, did you know about the services that BU offered?

Student: I knew they existed. I also knew that they weren't supposed to be very good.

Fabia: Did you ever go to them?

Student: Yes. They referred me to somebody else.

Fabia: (laughs) That's it?

Student: (laughs) Yes!!

Fabia: So you didn't find them very helpful?

Student: No!! I mean, I couldn't really tell because I was there for about 5 minutes.

Fabia: You only met with them one time?

Student: I met with this woman named Christina and she was just like, "I can't help you at this office, but we will try to find you somebody else."

Fabia: Oh, really?

Student: I guess people are looking for a therapist or somebody to talk to but they don't have that at BU. They will just talk to you once or twice. So if you're looking for some kind of actual substantive help with something, hopefully you have insurance because they are sending you somewhere else.

Fabia: Yeah, I know. It's crazy. Did you tell her, during your meeting, that you were so stressed and you wanted to quit school?

Student: Yes.

Fabia: And she was okay with that?

Student: She just said, "Okay, you're experiencing depression." And I just said, "Thank you, you're very helpful."

Fabia: So, um, also for this study, I attended the Health and Wellness Fair at BU where they were raising awareness about str...

Student: They have a Health and Wellness Fair? That's a thing? What do they talk about? There isn't any health and wellness at BU?

Fabia: (laughs) Oh my gosh, be nice!

Student: (laughs)

Fabia: But, I actually was talking to a woman from behavior Health Services and she said that student who are actually in the position that you were, they have a class that you can take during your hiatus from BU and it helps you with stress coping mechanisms and time movement skills and just the whole process of easing back into school. So, that wasn't offered to you?

Student: That's exciting, but I was never told about this program.

Fabia: Oh my gosh! Okay, so that makes me wonder whether or not it was a thing a year ago or if it is brand new.

Student: It is even a thing? Like, I was never told about this. Is it new?

Fabia: It honestly must be, I hope so.

Student: Maybe they added it because I was such an amazing student and I quit so they were like, "You know what, we don't want to lose anymore people like Dan!" (laughing)

Fabia: Since you do have experience with BU's services, how do you think they could better accommodate students that actually need mental health help?

Student: Um, maybe actually offer appointments for more than one time. That will be a good start.

Fabia: Mhm.

Student: Hire more staff, because they have like 6 people to deal with 20,000 students.

Fabia: (laughs)

Student: You know, (laughs) the ratio is not ideal at the moment. And what else? I don't know, um. Like I said, they didn't really do anything for me. They were nice, the secretary said "hello", the office management seems good.

Fabia: Mhm.

Student: I only waited for about 10 minutes to meet with somebody. So that was good. The office looked organized (laughs).

Fabia: So, you said they referred you to somebody after your first appointment, right?

Student: Well, they said to look for therapists in the area. So, I found some.

Fabia: Oh, they didn't that for you?

Student: No, they have like a thing where you can look. Like an online serve or something. So you can do that.

Fabia: But they weren't that helpful with it?

Student: I mean, no. Looking back on it, like yeah, what do you expect them to really do, but at the same time when you are in that kind of mental state, you aren't that motivated to figure out the system and figure out where to go. Do you know what I mean?

Fabia: Yeah, I feel like it's a lot to take on.

Student: Even though it's really not, but like, I don't know, whatever.

Fabia: I understand, when you're feeling that way, you just don't want to do it.

Student: Yeah, exactly. I just didn't want to bother.

Fabia: Aww.

Student: I think it would be nice if you didn't even have to get referred. If they just had a bigger staff, like more than 6 people.

Fabia: It might be beneficial if they had a professional psychiatrist onsite.

Student: Yeah, there's a psychiatrist at UConn. I don't see them, but they can actually prescribe drugs.

Fabia: Oh, really?

Student: Yeah, they have someone who you can meet with that prescribes medication.

Fabia: That's way better, I think. So, I think I will just ask another question about being at BU. When you were feeling stressed during your last couple weeks before deciding to leave, the stress you felt, was it pretty sudden or was it ongoing?

Student: No, it was a gradual accumulation of, I don't know, hatred towards the place.

Fabia: Aside from the fact that it was a lot of work, I know you were a chemistry major, did you feel like maybe your professors weren't as understanding or it was too competitive or something like that?

Student: I can talk forever about why I didn't like BU, but I'm not going to do that. In general, I would say I felt like I was in a lot of classes where the professors were hard to talk to. They were so smart that they weren't very approachable. A lot of the classes are really large and very difficult. So I feel like everyone is very distant from each other in a class. It is very competitive and you don't really get to make friends in that kind of environment, you don't really know the professor either. You know what I'm saying? What else did you ask about classes?

Fabia: Aside from them being a lot of work, what other...

Student: It's not just that it's a lot of work. I don't really like the culture of BU that much. I feel that it's very... I didn't really think it was so much about learning the material, I always also as a chemistry major so keep that in mind. But I never really felt like it was about learning the material. I felt like it was about making sure I got a higher grade than the person next to me. You know?

Fabia: Yeah, it's very competitive.

Student: Yeah, and that's stupid. What's the point of that. I'm not going to learn anything and I'm just not going to... I don't know.. you know?

Fabia: Yeah, you pay thousands of dollars to...

Student: Yeah, tens of thousands of dollars.

Fabia: Just to really be stressed.

Student: But yeah, it's just kind of frustrating. I think it makes people nasty towards one another, a little bit. Yeah you have the occasional gems like Fabia, or whatever (laughs). But for the most part, people are kind of like, you know, just like, "I have to study to do better than the others." I don't know... And I think that makes me very stressed. And then another thing that's kind of stressful that's not so much academic, but just the environment, it's a very wealthy school. And I'm not a very wealthy person or anything, so it can be a little annoying to go to school with these super rich princes and princesses from all around the world (laughs). And then you just feel like you're being judged like all the time. That's how I felt.

Fabia: I can see why you feel that way.

Student: But keep in mind, I was also roommates with a kid from Orange County and after that I was roommates with two Indian millionaires. So that was just my experience.

Fabia: So, do you feel like there was enough awareness about mental health on campus?

Student: What is that supposed to mean?

Fabia: Like, do you feel like people knew that everyone else was stressed out?

Student: I think the other students were kind of aware. I feel like a lot of people at BU are just unhappy. Do you feel like that?

Fabia: I wouldn't say I am unhappy but I have had my moments.

Students: Do you get the sense that people are unhappy?

Fabia: Yeah.

Student: That's what I mean. I think everyone is aware that everyone has problems and I also think everyone is also aware that mental health services suck since I talked to some friends about it before going. I think the students are aware.

Fabia: So since students are aware, do you think faculty and professors are aware?

Students: Depends. I don't think [chemistry professor] is too aware since he seems to only be thinking about water molecules.

Fabia: Yes! (laughs) He seems to be in his own world.

Student: I feel like a lot of the science professors, no offense, but they're not good with people at all...I feel like they are oblivious that people have problems outside of chemistry. Same with the math classes, but I never took too many other kinds of classes at BU, so I can't really say. It might be completely different for English classes or whatever. But, I mean, I think a lot of it is also that it's hard for the professors to be aware when the classes are so big. The classes are enormous so they can't get to know their students. They are just a bunch of numbers. So, I don't know. How do you solve the BU mental health crisis? (laughs) I really don't know. Part of it is just the competitiveness of it. You know?

Fabia: True.

Student: I think it makes everyone so insecure. Now, honestly, I don't care as much about my grades. I'm doing fine, it's just not something I think about. I just kind of so school.

Fabia: That's good, I'm happy you're happy.

Student: I don't think about, "Oh my, I only got an 87 on the test and the person next to me got an 88." But also part of it is because that's just how science classes are, unfortunately.

Fabia: I feel like in science, everyone is competitive because they're trying to go medical school.

Student: I felt like that in all my classes though. I think that's just sort of the culture at BU, to be honest.

Fabia: So, that's it!! That's all I really had to discuss with you. Thanks so much for participating.

Mapping

Summary

We performed a mapping activity with the members of our focus groups. At the beginning of the discussion we had each participant mark on a map of BU Student Health Services, as well as locations that made them feel stressed or that they used to relieve stress. Most students were able to identify Student Health Services. For places students went to relieve stress, they went to their apartments or dorms, the esplanade, or sometimes dining halls or other community areas on campus. For stressful areas, people marked Mugar, the student union (GSU), and other class buildings.