

Part of the **Student Voice** Collection

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Supporting Student Wellness: What's Enough and What's Too Much?

Many students want professors and advisers to help promote their well-being, including their mental health. But how involved do students really want them to get? Quite involved, according to new survey data from *Inside Higher Ed* and College Pulse.

By [Colleen Flaherty](#)



In a new Student Voice survey, the vast majority of respondents say they want a significant level of involvement from faculty members in addressing stress and mental health issues, and even in promoting their physical wellness. Students want advisers to help them reduce stress, as well.

Professors and even advisers are increasingly expected to play a role in promoting student wellness, including student mental health. But what's the right level of involvement?

Inside Higher Ed and College Pulse asked 1,250 two- and four-year college students at 59 institutions that question this month in a Student Voice flash survey. The results, detailed below, show that the vast majority students want a significant level of involvement from faculty members in addressing stress and mental health issues, and even in promoting their physical wellness. Students want advisers to help them reduce stress, as well.

None of this surprises Daniel Eisenberg, professor of health policy of management at the University of California, Los Angeles, and principal investigator of the Healthy Minds Network for research on adolescent and young adult mental health. Rather, he says, the survey results are “consistent with the idea that stress and mental health are closely connected to the academic life of students.” (Indeed, another recent [Student Voice survey](#) by *Inside Higher Ed* and College Pulse suggests a strong link between chronic stress, in particular, and students’ mental health and physical wellness.)

Eisenberg adds that students generally invest a lot of time, effort and emotions into their coursework, “so their well-being is connected to whether they feel like the academic environment is supportive, hostile or something in between. And professors are the people who most visibly create the academic environment for students.”

The new survey specifically asked college students what the ideal level of involvement of faculty members is helping students with stress and mental health struggles and in promoting their physical wellness, on a scale of zero (no involvement) to five (highest

level of involvement). It also asked a similar question about advisers' ideal level of involvement helping students reduce stress levels.

Among the top findings:

1. Eighty-five percent of students over all describe the ideal level of faculty involvement in reducing their stress levels as three or higher on a scale of zero to five. The largest share of students (37 percent) choose four, which corresponds to the following example of a faculty action: "Dropping students' lowest assignment grade and/or avoiding high-stakes assessments, such as exams worth 50 percent or more of students' final grade."
2. Eight in 10 students over all say the ideal level of adviser involvement in easing students' stress levels is three to five. More than a quarter of students (27 percent) say five, such as "organizing workshops on study skills, time management and stress reduction techniques."
3. Nearly half of students say four (25 percent) or five (23 percent) is the ideal level of faculty involvement in helping students struggling with their mental health. But the largest share of students—an additional third of respondents—say the ideal level is three, such as providing flexibility for students struggling with their mental health when appropriate. ([Here's more](#) on past survey insights into students' views on flexibility in the classroom, plus expert recommendations for adopting relevant policies that are clear and equitable.)
4. Just 6 percent of students say professors shouldn't be involved at all in promoting students' physical health and wellness.

Whereas four-year students are more likely to want higher levels of intervention from faculty members in reducing stress than are community college students, community college and four-year students are aligned in their desire for help from advisers.

The Ideal Faculty Role: Managing Student Stress

Regarding faculty involvement in easing students' stress, just 2 percent of students say professors shouldn't be involved at all. An additional 12 percent say they should be lightly involved (one to two on the scale), with example faculty actions ranging from putting stress management resources in syllabi to talking about student stressors and stress management in class.

Another quarter of students describe ideal faculty involvement in easing stress as a three on the scale, to include being mindful of how deadline times impact students' lives. The largest share of students, 37 percent, choose four on the scale, such as dropping students' lowest assignment grade. And nearly a quarter of students over all say five, such as offering extra credit for completing stress reduction activities outside of class.

Results are relatively consistent across various student demographics and subgroups. For example, students who take all their classes online are about as likely to select four or five on the faculty stress support scale as are students who take all their classes in person. Some exceptions:

- Four-year college students are more likely than two-year college students to want higher levels of intervention (63 percent of four-year students choose four or five on the scale, compared to 52 percent of community college students).
- Forty-five percent of students at private institutions choose four on the scale, compared to 35 percent at public institutions.
- Women are likelier than men to choose five, or the highest level of support, at 27 percent versus 18 percent, respectively.
- LGBTQIA+ students are somewhat more likely than straight peers to select four or five, at 66 percent versus 58 percent, respectively

- Among students with a mental health condition (n=483), two-thirds choose four or five, compared to 57 percent of students without such a condition.

Addressing Student Mental Health Challenges

Asked about the ideal level of professor involvement in helping students struggling with their mental health on a scale of zero to five, just 2 percent of students say zero, while 15 percent say one or two (up to faculty members talking about mental health and resources in class).

A third of students say three (providing flexibility for struggling students). About a quarter each say four (knowing common signs of mental health struggles and proactively reaching out to students who may be struggling) and five (connecting students with mental health resources and regularly checking in with them about their well-being.)

Notable findings or differences between subgroups:

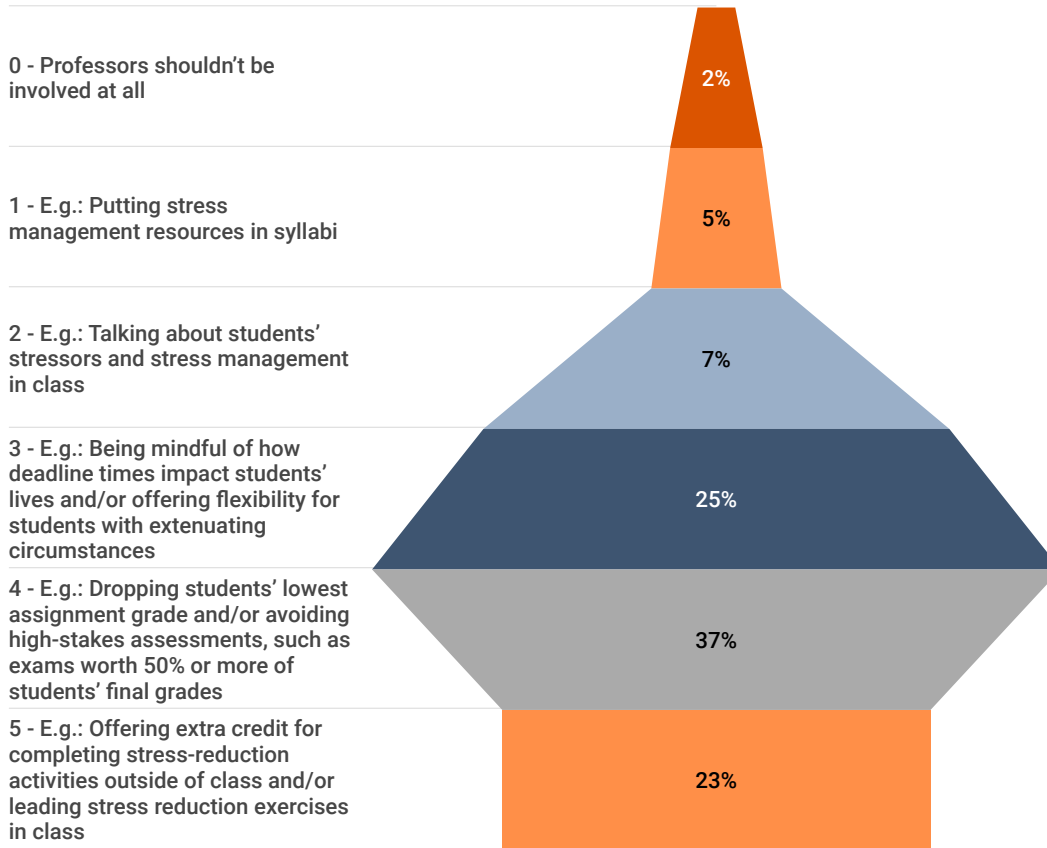
- By major, 56 percent of arts and humanities students say four or five on the scale, compared to 45 percent of students in the sciences and 52 percent of students studying social sciences.
- Online-only and in-person students want similarly high levels of faculty involvement in student mental health: 56 percent of students studying exclusively online say four or five, compared to 51 percent for in-person students.
- Desired support levels aren't significantly elevated for students with mental health conditions.

How Much Help With Mental Health and Stress Students Really Want

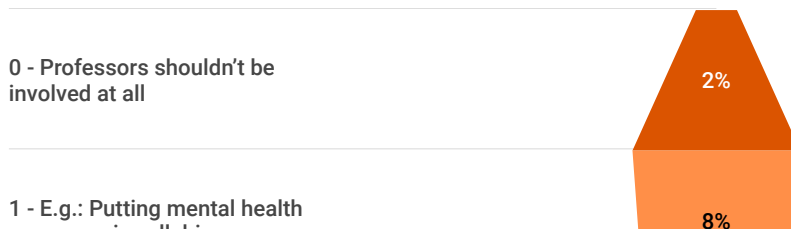
Students describe the **ideal level of faculty involvement** in helping them a) *ease stress* and b) *address mental health issues*, on a scale of 0 (no involvement) to 5 (highest level of involvement). Examples of faculty actions given.



Help with stress



Help with mental health struggles



resources in syllabi

2 - E.g.: Talking about mental health and available resources in class

7%

3 - E.g.: Providing flexibility for students struggling with their mental health when appropriate

33%

4 - E.g.: Knowing common signs of mental health struggles and proactively reaching out to students who may be struggling

25%

5 - E.g.: Helping students connect with mental health resources on campus and regularly checking in with them about their wellbeing

23%

Source: Inside Higher Ed/College Pulse survey of 1,250 college students.



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Promoting Student Physical Wellness

What about faculty involvement in supporting students' physical health and wellness? The topic doesn't get as much attention as the faculty role in mental health does, but many college leaders and mental health advocates see promoting physical wellness as a way to get upstream of the mental health crisis. And few survey respondents say that professors shouldn't be involved at all in promoting students' physical well-being. About a quarter choose one or two on the scale of zero to five, to include putting health and wellness resources in syllabi and talking about health, wellness and self-care in class.

The largest share of students, nearly three in 10, select three on the scale, such as avoiding late-night or early-morning deadlines to encourage healthy sleep habits. About two in 10 students each want professors to do more than that, such as (four) incorporating mindfulness practices in class and (five) adding wellness activities to

the curriculum or offering extra credit for participation in wellness activities outside of class.

Notable findings:

- Students with chronic illnesses or physical disabilities (n=130) or mental health conditions are not more likely than peers without such conditions to want higher levels of faculty support in promoting physical health and wellness.
- Online students are slightly more likely than in-person students to want higher levels of support.

Helping Promote Student Physical Health and Wellness

Students say to what degree professors should help **actively promote their physical health and wellness**, on a scale from 0 (no involvement) to 5 (highest level of involvement). Examples of faculty actions given.



0 - Professors shouldn't be involved at all

1 - E.g.: Putting health and wellness resources in syllabi

2 - E.g.: Talking about health, wellness and self-care in class

3 - E.g.: Avoiding late night or early morning deadlines to encourage healthy sleep habits

4 - E.g.: Incorporating mindfulness practices in class, such as brief breathing exercises

5 - E.g.: Incorporating wellness activities into the curriculum and/or offering extra credit for participation in wellness activities out of class

Source: Inside Higher Ed/College Pulse survey of 1,250 college students.



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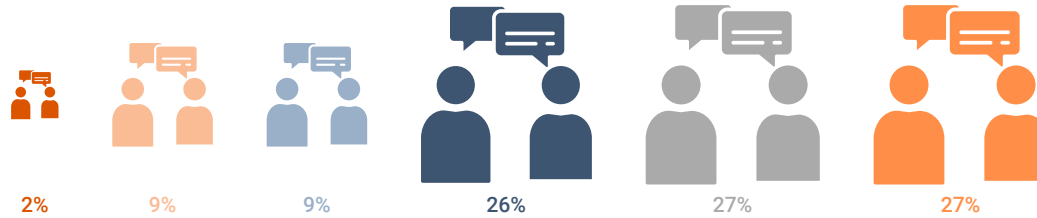
Advisers and Managing Stress

Students believe academic advisers also have a key role to play in helping them combat stress. Just 2 percent of students say their advisers shouldn't be involved in this domain at all. Nearly two in 10 students say they should be involved at a level of one or two on a zero-to-five scale, with example actions including informing students of available stress management resources and talking about students' stressors and stress management in advising meetings.

About a quarter of students each are looking for adviser levels of three to five, starting with helping students create balanced and manageable course schedules and study plans and, finally, organizing workshops on study skills, time management and stress reduction techniques.

Advisers: Helping Students Manage Stress

Students say to what degree academic advisers should help students ease their stress, on a scale from 0 (no involvement) to 5 (highest level of involvement). Examples of adviser actions given.



0 - Advisers shouldn't be involved at all

1 - E.g.: Letting students know stress management resources are available

2 - E.g.: Talking about students' stressors and stress management in advising meetings

3 - E.g.: Helping students create a balanced and manageable course schedule

4 - E.g.: Helping students create effective study plans and set short- and long-term goals

5 - E.g.: Organizing workshops on study skills, time management, and stress reduction techniques

Source: Inside Higher Ed/College Pulse survey of 1,250 college students.



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Laura I. Rendón, professor emerita of educational leadership and policy studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio, says that faculty members were for too long “left out of the mental health solution equation.” Because professors see students almost every day, she adds, they are “in the best position to recognize and assist students in distress.”

Validating Students

Rendón, the originator of validation theory and a longtime advocate of validating relationships between faculty members and students, says there is now “plenty of research to show validation works. This is something that faculty, as caring humanitarians, can and should do.”

What does validation look like? Rendón says it’s “simply about faculty taking the initiative to reach out to students who need an empathetic, human relationship.” Two examples: asking students how they’re doing and what help they need.

This doesn’t mean faculty members must or should “engage as professional therapists,” Rendón says, echoing this common refrain from student mental health experts. Rather, she says, it means that students “want to be seen. They want to be heard. They want to know somebody cares about them. They want to know they can be successful college students.”

Eisenberg, of Healthy Minds and UCLA, says there are some relatively “easy” things that faculty members can do to show support for students’ mental health, including those included in the survey. In general, he adds, “I think students appreciate any acknowledgment by faculty that their lives are often stressful.”

Is it possible to do too much? Eisenberg says yes, and he underscores that professors aren’t therapists.

The ideal faculty role in supporting students, he continues, “is to be supportive in small but meaningful ways and to refer to resources such as counseling for more intensive needs.”

Written By



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