A Trauma-Informed Approach to Building College Students’ Resilience

University of Michigan Depression on College Campuses Conference
Concurrent Session 10:45-12:00
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Introduction to the Project
Resilience

• Resilience refers to a **dynamic** process of positive **adaptation** within the context of significant **adversity**  
  *(Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000)*

• Our view of resilience:
  o Resilience is not a single trait, but is made up of protective factors or buffers to stress that can be built up and improved upon *(Davidson & McEwen, 2012)*
  o Resilience is accessible to anyone, regardless of personal histories.

• Published description of Student Resilience Project:
Students face challenges and need help

- Students deal with a variety of pressures: finances, living away from home, social demands, and rigorous academic expectations (Sungkok et al., 2017; Ulbrich & Kirk, 2017)

- Mental health problems are significant: anxiety, depression, substance abuse, self-harm (Eisenberg, Lipson, Ceglarek, Kern, & Phillips, 2018; Pedrelli, Nyer, Yeung, Zulauf, & Wilens, 2015)

- Trauma histories are a significant factor in adapting to stress

All students can benefit from learning:
- new coping skills,
- effective stress management,
- intentional emotional regulation approaches

Project goals include:
- increasing connections to campus resources
- increasing sense of belonging
- destigmatizing help-seeking
Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma

- ACEs and trauma are widespread among young adult student populations (Read, Ouimette, White, Colder, & Farrow, 2011; Smyth, Hickemyer, Heron, Wonderlich, & Pennebaker, 2008; Wiehn, Homberg, & Fischer, 2018).

- Large majorities of matriculating students (66%-89%) report a history of trauma, 10% report symptoms of clinical PTSD, another 10% report subclinical effects of trauma (Read et al 2011).

- High prevalence of ACEs increases vulnerability to early drinking onset and drinking to cope in college (Read, Radomski, & Borsari, 2015, Rothman, Edwards, Heeren, & Hingson, 2008).

- Stress from ACEs can impede brain development responsible for executive decision-making & anger management, making students more vulnerable to higher risk taking.

- This is also an opportunity to build important coping skills: their emotional regulation, impulse control, cognitive flexibility are still developing (Anderson, 2003).
Trauma also interferes with learning

A history of trauma influences the learning capacity of many adults

- Educators who are aware that trauma can result in fear, mistrust, dissociation and inflexibility can better recognize and respond to these responses and create a safe learning environment to minimize or prevent their consequences

- Negative effects of ACEs can interfere with student transition to college
- **Good news**: Neuroscience shows brain can heal from effects of trauma
- Trauma-informed approach is needed to address student mental health challenges
- Change question from “What is wrong with you” to “What happened to you?”
Student Resilience Project: A Complement to Existing Services

**Animation**
- The effect of trauma on the brain
- Process of healing and building resilience

**Exercises**
- Affirming values and strengths
- Keys to emotional self-regulation
- Cognitive reframing
- Breathing for relaxation and sleep
- Failure as a pathway to success
- Writing for mental health

**Brief Audio Trainings**
- Faculty normalizing help seeking
- Frustration tolerance
- Sleep and relaxation audios
- Stress management
- Anxiety reduction

**Videos and More**
- Personal accounts of student healing and thriving
- Relaxation and Yoga

**All content:**
- Accessible 24/7
- Private, online interventions
- Culturally sensitive; address discrimination
- Acknowledgment of trauma
Theoretical Framework of Student Resilience Project

Primary Prevention Approach:
- Building protective factors for all students
- Increasing help-seeking and utilization of campus resources

Applied Science Approach:
- Science of ACES: lessons from research on adverse childhood experiences
- Mental health promotion: breaking down stigma and barriers to health information
- Trauma education: providing language for and insight into lived experiences
- Resilience education: enhancing coping skills
- Positive psychology concepts: strength-based, affirming values, self-efficacy
- Proven stress management techniques: meditation, deep breathing, yoga
Theoretical Framework, p. 2

**Implementation Science Approach**
- Integrating evidence-based interventions into college campus setting
- Ongoing program evaluation and monitoring

**Design thinking principles:**
- Authentic, unconventional design
- Ongoing involvement of students

**Dissemination Science Approach:**
- Leadership buy-in
- Intensive outreach:
  - Social media,
  - Peer-to-peer marketing
  - High visual presence on campus
Introduction to Resilience
Identify Your Strengths

Everyone has them.
Click on 3 strengths to add to your My Strengths list.

- Creativity
- Flexibility
- Kindness
- Respect
- Gratitude
- Hope
- Optimism
- Faith
- Logical
- Goals
- Hobbies
- Fairness
- Learning
- Hopeful
- Integrity
- Listening
- Hardworking
- Open-minded

My Strengths:
- Creativity
- Flexibility
- Kindness

Congratulations! These strengths provide a solid foundation for resilience. Grow and build on these strengths while you are here at FSU.
What I Wish I Knew

My First Semester of College
These students overcame challenges and built resilience.

Click the photos to hear their stories and then get connected to FSU's resources.

- Everyday Stressors
- Rejection
- Culture Shock
- Breakups
- Homelessness
- Burnout
- Decisions about Alcohol
- Finding a New Way

Student Resilience Project

Watch Video: Culture Shock
Real Talk

FSU EXPERTS ARE HERE TO HELP YOU NAVIGATE BIG ISSUES.

Listen to at least two talks to count toward your Certificate of accomplishment.
Learn New Skills

Student Resilience Project

Learn New Skills

All FSU students will benefit from developing these skills. All freshmen must complete at least one new skill.

SPECTACULAR FAILURE

See how some of the world’s most famous people have used their failures to pave their paths to success.

Learn more about the importance of failure

RELAXATION SKILLS

Everyone gets stressed and tired at some point. Learn easy coping skills with audio and visual tools for sleep and relaxation.

Learn more about relaxation

WRITE TO RELAX

Learn about the simplicity and power of journaling to relieve stress, reflect on your experiences, and thrive.

Learn more about writing to relax

MINDFULNESS

What’s all the buzz about? The new emphasis on mindfulness includes learning to slow down and be present in the moment to reduce stress.
Reach Out

Reach Out: Get What You Need

If you feel...

- Down
- Tired
- In a rut
- Overwhelmed
- Alone
- Anxious
- Depressed
- In crisis

If you have questions about...

- Sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression
- Sexual and reproductive health
- Resources for caregivers
Student Ambassadors

THE FSU STUDENT RESILIENCE PROJECT
strong.fsu.edu
850-644-1715

Coping Skills  Resilience  Resources
YOU deserve to be Healthy!
Reducing Anxiety  Stress Management

You deserve to be healthy!
Learn more at strong.fsu.edu
Marketing Materials

The Student Resilience Project is a web-based, research-informed toolkit developed to encourage students’ wellness by helping them learn to manage stress in healthy ways and increase their sense of belonging. The website features videos, skill-building activities, resources and information, including podcasts by campus experts.

Learn more at strong.fsu.edu

What can you expect to find at strong.fsu.edu?

Videos
- An Introduction to Trauma and Resilience
- What I Wish I Knew My First Semester

Exercises on Identifying Your Seminole Values and Strengths

Real-Talk Audio podcasts on the following topics:
- Grief
- LGBTQ issues
- Depression
- Frustration tolerance
- Quietting Your Busy Mind
- Space and Wellbeing
- Calming
- Intrusive Thoughts
- Supporting Students of Color
- When You’re Worried About a Friend

Stress Management and Relaxation Skills and Techniques, including:
- Music relaxation
- Sleep audios
- Meditation
- Journaling
- Yoga
- Mindfulness
- The lessons of failure
Descriptive Data of initial student impressions of the site during pilot:

After viewing the student videos, more than 80% of student respondents agreed:

- Students facing challenges would find the website helpful.
- Would probably use the resources described in the site.

90% of students believed the university resources listed would help themselves or others overcome challenges.

80% would return to the site and view additional content.

88% of students rated the website as believable, trustworthy and accurate.

70% would recommend the site to other students.
Implementation Research
Testing Video Restorative Narratives (n=229) (in press)

Rules for Restorative Narratives:

**Restorative Narratives must:**
- Capture hard truths and rough emotional terrain
- Highlight meaningful progress through journey
- Reveal universal truths and be relatable
- Occur over time
- Be authentic and true
- Strengths-based, share hope with others

**Restorative Narratives must not:**
- Express a false sense of hope
- Pretend everything is “all better”
- Focus on tragedy or despair
- Show immediate recovery

(Tenore, 2016)
Another theoretical guidepost:

The more similar someone feels they are to those delivering educational messages:
- the more likely they are to imitate the behavior displayed in the message and
- the stronger the belief that the individual can accomplish what was accomplished by the similar actor (Moyer-Guse, 2008).

Using restorative narrative rules and a diverse set of student actors, we tested our narratives & found direct effects on behavioral intentions.

**Results:**
Students’ perceptions of the restorative narrative videos directly influenced response efficacy, including:

- student intention to seek resources and
- share content with others

(Ray, Arpan, Oehme, Perko, & Clark, 2019)
## Important Ethical Considerations in Creating Restorative Narratives

**Privacy issues and unintended consequences:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential that online narrative may expose student to bullying, privacy violations, embarrassment, humiliation.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative should be delivered by someone else</td>
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<td>Keep it short!</td>
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<th>Peer narratives should reflect common struggles</th>
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<td>Have your IRB evaluate plan before launch to protect all involved</td>
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<td>Abide by all internal University policies (Title IX) know what must and must not be kept confidential</td>
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Future of the Project

• **FSU Student Resilience Project**- will continue to add content to project, and publish on research findings
  - 3rd paper, under review, (on demographic differences in utilization and response to project),
  - 4th paper, in progress, (control group results)

• **Customizable College Toolkit**- available Summer 2019

• **Basic Trauma and Resilience Certification** - through FSU’s Center for Professional Development - Summer 2019

For more information contact us at aperko@fsu.edu
References


