

The Final Push: Navigating Student Mental Health in the End-of-Semester Sprint

By Bea Kress

As schools across the country wrap up the spring semester, students often have a difficult time pushing through. Many are burnt out, while others are facing the effects of stress and anxiety. The pressure of final exams, papers, and projects can become overwhelming to some, notably as the deadlines approach. It is vital for students, along with professors and other faculty members, to prioritize their mental and physical health throughout finals season. There are copious ways that can help maintain health here at Syracuse University.

Self-care

One strategy for managing mental health during the last stretch of the semester is to prioritize self-care. This involves taking time from busy schedules to engage in joyful activities. It can be as simple as spending time with loved ones or reading a book.

Syracuse University Professor Kevin Antshel of the Psychology Department works with students in and out of class. He focuses on psychopathology with a specific emphasis on attention deficit / hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). "Self-care is very important, yet underappreciated," Antshel said. "Overworking oneself is the main cause of burn out. Students should make sure to take time to engage in self-care."

The Barnes Center at the Arch

Additionally, Syracuse University offers various resources of support in regard to mental and physical health services. The Barnes Center at the Arch provides easy access to counseling, group therapy, and many more services. These services offer a safe and confidential space for students to explore their feelings and develop coping mechanisms. All services, with the exception of psychiatry, are free to current students. Along with appointment-made services, the counseling center also offers crisis intervention for students who are experiencing a mental health emergency. It is key to remember that seeking help is not a sign of weakness but strength.

Another resource students can turn to is peer support. SU offers peer support programs, including mentoring. Peer support programs allow students to reach out to other fellow students who are experiencing similar challenges. It can be convenient for students who are feeling isolated or alone during these times.



The counseling center at the Barnes Center at the Arch offers individual and group counseling. Photograph by Brianna Kress

Recreation at the Barnes Center

Alongside mental health care, the Barnes Center offers recreational services to improve students' well-being. From fitness classes to ice skating at Tennity Ice Skating Pavilion, SU offers outlets for students to work off any extra stress accumulated throughout the end of the semester for free. As the weather improves, outdoor recreations like the Challenge Course and Zip Line become available through appointment via the Wellness Portal.

Spending Time Outdoors

Getting outside on campus whenever the weather allows is an efficient way to boost moods. Not only can it boost hormone levels, the simple activity of just sitting outside allows students to work at the same time.

Stress Management

Stress management is a critical skill that every student should master, especially during the final exams season. As a student, managing stress can drastically improve academic performance and overall well-being. Counselors at the Barnes Center can teach students efficient ways to combat stress. Student Outreach and Retention (SOaR) focuses on identifying and removing barriers to assist students in meeting their goals. "Consider using mindfulness-based stress reduction management therapy (MBSR). It's essentially meditation therapy originally designed for stress management but is now being used to treat numerous illnesses."

Procrastination is the main causes for stress and anxiety in students. It's so easy to fall behind on work and "save it for later," but in most cases it never ends well. When asked what coping mechanisms for anxiety based on finals students would benefit most from, Antshel said, "Exposure and limiting procrastination. Procrastination worsens anxiety in the long run. Stop procrastinating!" Antshel also suggests that in an event that a student has fallen behind in work due to mental health reasons, the student should contact their professor and reach out to a mental health provider for treatment.