BRINGING RESILIENCE TO THE WORKPLACE
A MENTALLY HEALTHY RETURN TO CAMPUS

SPEAKER ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dr. Drea Letamendi (she/ella)
Roles and Affiliations
What I do
Land recognition
Thanks

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MYTH: “I GOT THIS!”

RESILIENCE IS:

• Adapting from and learning from setbacks, missteps, hardships, and failures.
• Always in context with our social, political, and environmental experiences.
• Self-awareness, self-efficacy and self-compassion.
• Attainable.

RESILIENCE IS NOT:

• “Bouncing back.”
• “Maximized” when basic needs go unmet.
• Living a life free of stress or emotional pain.
• Fixed. Binary.
• Being indestructible!
INTERSECTING STRESSORS + MULTIPLE REALITIES

COVID Crisis (illness, economic, employment, politics, division, anti-science groups, etc.)
Grief and Loss
Racial Violence
Vicarious Trauma

Credit: Marvel
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THE “ECHO” PANDEMIC

“In an ironic twist, many of the strategies that are critical to ensuring our collective public health during this pandemic may put people at greater risk for mental health issues.”
- Journal of Psychological Trauma, 2020

“It’s clear that the pandemic is continuing to have a disproportionate effect on certain groups: communities of color, parents with school-aged children, and essential workers” who will show “physical consequences of prolonged stress.”
- APA President, 2021

THE ECHO PANDEMIC

• Crises anticipated after the pandemic
• The “collateral damage” from COVID is here → led to an uptick in depression and anxiety—4 in 10 adults have experienced these conditions since the COVID pandemic began, up from 1 in 10, (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2021).
• Just before the summer, 46% of American adults reported they are not comfortable going back to living like they used to. And 49% are uneasy about adjusting to in-person interaction (APA, 2021)
• New data shows that suicide rates are up more than 50% among young people between the ages of 10 and 24 (CDC, 2021)
• Unemployment instability and the connection between unemployment and mental health, suicide, etc.
“WHAT IS CAUSING PEOPLE STRESS?”

1. **Acute stress** – Unexpected but short reaction to a stressful event: An exam, a car accident, an assault

2. **Chronic stress** – Emotional pressure over a prolonged period of time

“We’ve essentially been in training for a phobia,” says David Spiegel, associate chair of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Stanford School of Medicine / Director of the Stanford Center on Stress and Health.

~WE ARE DEALING WITH BOTH~

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STRESS VS BURNOUT

Feeling exhausted at work isn’t necessarily burnout. We’re tired when we’re not taking care of our basic needs.

Stress is our body’s response to challenging situations, feelings, and threats.

Credit: Cedars Sinai

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SIGNS OF STRESS

I feel tired
I find it hard to relax or “wind down”
I find it hard to make decisions
My heart races/I breathe fast
I eat too much or too little
I get headaches
I feel emotionally numb
I have trouble feeling hopeful
I feel overwhelmed and helpless
I forget things
I am easily irritated or annoyed
I have trouble completing my assignments or my work
I have back and neck pain/chronic tension
I forget things 😅
**BALANCE, ROUTINE, SAFETY**

- Establish a routine—eat, exercise, and sleep regularly.
- Take frequent breaks from work—STOP “doomscrolling” and limit how much you check the news cycle.
- Increase your “feel-good” activities—do things that bring you joy.

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**REDDUCING COVID / RE-ENTRY STRESS**

Ready yourself for long-lasting implications by examining the areas of your well-being:

**Financial**
- Start an emergency budget
- Call your loan companies
- Call your landlord
- Call credit card companies
- Find local relief programs
- Avoid things that trigger your spending

**Emotional**
- Take breaks from the media cycle
- Practice self-compassion and savor small successes
- Seek therapy or talk to a counselor

**Social**
- Form a low-key peer support group
- Virtual connections for non-academic activities
- Consider COVID pods or bubbles

**Racial/Identity**
- Mentorships
- Take breaks from hypervisibility (racial battle fatigue)
- Find spaces of connection, validation, love and affirmation

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WHY ARE WE ANXIOUS now?

- Tension is strong following a crisis
- We do not know who is vaccinated
- Social skills have atrophied
- Do not have much to talk about due to quarantine life
- Mistrust due to information shifting
- Guilt/shame about attempting normal or routine activities amidst trauma

ACKNOWLEDGING RE-ENTRY STRESS:

Spending 20 months protecting our bodies from a virus can lead to discomfort during re-entry.

Take it slow: Find a pace that you are comfortable with

Embrace the gray: Health protocols on the campus will continue to shift; welcome some level of “not knowing”

Celebrate what you can control: Make lists of things within your locus of control, like healthy habits and how you spend breaks.

Keep zooming

Practice gratitude by observing and journaling things and people that contribute to your joy, growth, and safety.

Breathe! We often to not realize the gradual onset of stress that we carry within our bodies. Breathing and mindfulness helps to lessen the tension and bring more focus.
Managing social anxiety:

- Set boundaries ahead of time.
- Set a structure—how long, who will be there, and when to leave.
- Redirect politely
- Reflect on topics that you can talk about—not related to COVID (make a list rn!)

Preparing for Conversations:

1. Setting the table
2. “Common ground” container
3. Conversation steering
Racial Battle Fatigue is the “cumulative result of a natural race-related stress response to distressing mental and emotional conditions. These conditions emerged from constantly facing racially dismissive, demeaning, insensitive and/or hostile racial environments and individuals.” (Smith, 2008)

How often do you confront oppressive agents, environments, or situations that limit your space, time, energy, and motion (i.e., STEM)?
- Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Consistently

Race-related stress operate as “psycho-pollutants” in the social environment for racially marginalized groups (Pierce, 1995)

Chronic and acute.

Oppression is stressful.

Racism and discrimination can have the following effects on our mental health:

**Physical**
- Body is dysregulated
- Pain
- Headaches
- Heart rate
- Muscle spasms
- Loss of Appetite
- Exhaustion

**Cognitive**
- Intrusive thoughts
- Images
- Ruminations
- Poor Memory
- Dissociation
- Poor self-concept

**Emotional:**
- Anger
- Sadness
- Fear
- Worry
- Anxiety
- Numbness
- Hypervigilance
- Shame
A RETURN TO OFFICE = ^MICROAGGRESSIONS + BIAS

WORKING AT HOME HAS LARGELY SPARED STAFF FROM:

- having colleagues touch their hair
- being mistaken for another colleague of the same race (a problem solved by having names displayed in video mtgs)
- overhearing insensitive commentary on or being pressured to discuss traumatizing news events such as racist violence or coronavirus outbreaks in their home country
- fielding comments from passersby on their “angry” (actually focused) expressions
- Unconscious demotion (resolved by having titles/roles and credentials displayed in video mtgs)

(The Washington Post, 2021)

BENEFITS TO REMOTE WORK

Productivity and efficiency: Allowing people to work in an environment where they don’t feel the need to keep their guard up means “releasing that mental burden” from people and increasing attention toward actual tasks.

Meaningfulness: Working from home reduced hindrance stressors—such as commutes—and increased feelings of autonomy, choice, and relatedness in their work.

- American Psychological Association, 2021
BURNOUT IS:

a syndrome characterized by “emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a
decrease in self-fulfillment,” as a result of chronic exposure to emotionally
draining environments

- International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 2021

BURNOUT IS:

When our personal values are invalidated, challenged, or extinguished

I feel:  
Deteriorated  
Detached  
Derailed

Signs of burnout:

- Emotional agitation /or emotional numbing
- Prone to conflict, withdrawing, or both
- Presenteeism or absenteeism
- Being unable to think well. (Everything is important and nothing is important)
- Feeling ineffective (“am I even doing my job?”)
- Slight paranoia (“are people out to get me or make my job harder?”)
- Flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, avoidance, rumination

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WHAT IS YOUR KRYPTONITE? (WHAT THREATENS YOUR EFFORTS?)

- Perfectionism and Performance Anxiety (Has to be perfect or "just right.")
- Imposter Phenomenon and self doubt (feeling like you are a fraud or worry that you're here due to a mistake/overcompensating)
- Presenteeism (e.g., "I cannot abandon the work.")
- Batman-ing ("I am the only one who can do this.")
- Rest guilt ("I feel guilty/anxious/selfish when I take breaks or experience joy)
- Rep Sweats: (Being the "only" in your dept/unit/team and feel pressure to perform)

What does self-care look like, for real?

- [ ] self care
- [x] self care

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The "Self-Care" movement creates another cultural expectation – another competency we must prove we can master, and we are then defined and evaluated by how well we handle stress – ignoring the more realistic expectation that we should change the dynamics of stress-inducing environments.

Further complicated by identity, race, social, and gender roles...

**CANDID SELF-CARE**

1. **Harnessing what works:**
   What did you learn over the pandemic that you will bring here?

2. **Habit disruption:**
   What practices no longer serve your well-being?
MENTAL PRACTICES TO BUILD RESILIENCE AND FLOW:

Who’s got my back? Locate the folx who will be willing and able to support you and help you problem solve difficult situations. Do not wait for a crisis to reach out to them.

What can I count on? Solid and predictable aspects of work help us maintain positive mental well-being. Anything from the equipment we use to the modes of getting to the worksite, these everyday comforts and conveniences build a sense of certainty.

When might I see significant change? Take mindful moments to imagine a positive scenario in the future (psychological distancing), which can build hope, rationality and motivation.

Where does my body hurt? Chances are, we are feeling pain or discomfort due to stress. Include all your available senses to review where you feel strain, aches, disconnection or lack of focus.

FRAMING OUR WORK:
CONSCIOUSNESS IN LEADERSHIP

1. Perceive – gently explore your positionality and try to take a humble approach to your models before you take action. Manage anxiety and uncertainty by speaking with staff and directly asking about concerns.

2. Recognize – where do you see dehumanizing elements in your (workplace) practices? Recognize and normalize ambivalence about coming back to the worksite or entering high-traffic workspaces after long periods of autonomy.

3. Understand – what did you glean from this time of reflection? Are you holding on to any discomfort from becoming more conscious? Are you ready for engagement? Be mindful of altered dynamics and observe the relationships that exist on your teams. Plan team discussions to re-spark connection, harmony, and empathy.

4. Respond – Support mental health by normalizing the challenges of the crisis and share resources for mental well-being.
UCLA STAFF AND FACULTY COUNSELING CENTER

UCLA’s Staff and Faculty Counseling Center (SFCC) fosters a productive and supportive work environment for all employees.

Services include confidential counseling for employees and their family members, management consultation, coaching, training, retreat facilitation, work-life programs, support groups and community resource referrals.

Services are free, voluntary and confidential.

www.chr.ucla.edu/employee-counseling

TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES:

Self Preservation: “I am”
• Taking social media breaks
• Forming healthy boundaries
• Choosing to avoid traumatic video and toxic feeds

Self Soothing: “I can”
• Being with nature
• Mindfulness
• Laughter and joy
• “Me time” (In service to no one but yourself)

Self Compassion: “I will”
• Saying “no” (clearly and directly)
• Opting out of heavy conversations
• Taking breaks from social advocacy/treating your racial battle fatigue

Artist: Brandon Han

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EMPOWERMENT

“The greatest weapon we have against job stress is our ability to choose one story over another.”

– William James

Loki series (Disney+)

Remember to Breathe...

You got this!
THANK YOU!

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