



Increasing Resilience and Grit within the Student Population

More than ever students need strong coping skills and encouragement to thrive under difficult circumstances. This can be accomplished by helping students focus on (1) Improving physical and emotional health; (2) Strengthening relationships and social connections; (3) Reducing stress, anxiety, and depression; (4) Increasing academic and work performance; (5) Managing challenges and difficulties and (6) Achieving goals.

Resilience is the ability to:

- Persevere or adapt when things go awry
- Overcome obstacles
- Bounce back from major setbacks
- Reach out and broaden your world

Grit is:

- Passion
- Persistence
- The ability to achieve what is important to your values¹

Importance

Growing evidence supports a clear association between the COVID-19 pandemic and mental health issues among college students. The outbreak of COVID-19 affected the lives of all sections of society as people were asked to self-quarantine. The abrupt closure of our universities in March 2020 and the change to learning online may have caused psychological problems including frustration, stress, depression, anxiety, loneliness, isolation and more. Many studies suggest that institutions of learning should take all the necessary measures to enhance the educational experience by mitigating the negative impacts caused due to the COVID-19 outbreak.² Mental health issues persist even as we appear to be emerging out of the pandemic.

The Process of increasing Resilience and Grit

“Advances in neuroscience research have established that the brain is “plastic,” or changeable, throughout the lifespan. Our thoughts and actions influence brain chemistry and create new neural pathways, which in turn influence mood and behavior. With practice, proper exercises can create and strengthen neural pathways that promote well-being and support thriving. This process can be thought of as an emotional fitness program, helping the brain become stronger, healthier, and more resilient.”³

¹ Reivich, K. & Shatté, A. 2002. *The Resilience Factor*. New York: Broadway Books

² K Chaturvedi, [DK Vishwakarma](#), N Singh - Children and youth services ..., 2021

³ Jessica Gifford <https://wellstudent.co/> (accessed in August 2021)

We are working with Generation Z, who are:

- Digital Natives – could swipe before they learned to talk
- Three or more hours are spent in front of screens every day
- Prefer Snapchat, Instagram, Tik Tok,
- More diverse than X and Y
- More obese than any other generation
- Attention span decreasing from 12 to 6 seconds
- Overwhelmed – “schoolwork, managing a social media identity and fretting about career, climate change, sexism, racism—you name it”
- Lonely: 3 million adolescents 12-17 have had a “major depressive episode” in the past year
- Less Religious Identification: In 1966, 6.6% of incoming freshman reported being unaffiliated with any religion. In 2015, nearly one-third (29.6%) reported un-affiliation
- And – they have been exposed to the COVID 19 Pandemic

They have come to the world from 1997 to 2012; Their approximate time on campus: 2016 to 2032. Seven issues have commanded the attention of Generation Z so far. These are: (1) health care; (2) mental health; (3) higher education; (4) economic security; (5) civic engagement; (6) race equity; and (7) the environment.

“There is a tendency to be either overly romantic or critical about new generations. The reality is that members of Generation Z face the same life challenges as previous generations, but in a super-connected and rapid-moving technological age. And let us not forget that they have the same deep needs for love, significance, meaning, and belonging as every previous generation”.⁴

The Benefits of Resilience Skill Training

By considering student’s unique life circumstances like trauma, lack of life skills, peer/societal pressure, COVID 19 and other challenges Resilience Skill Training focuses on:

1. **Assisting** with recognition of challenging circumstances and obstacles
2. **Engaging** students in exercises that fortify mental health, well-being and healthy choices by enhancing their ability to bounce back from or adjust to misfortune or change.
3. **Engaging** students in activities that strengthen skill development that lead to higher efficacy.
4. **Guiding** students to consistently practice exercises that promote resilience and grit, leading to a healthy lifestyle and designed to increase the likelihood of academic success.
5. **Reinforcing** progress by helping participants to reflect on outcome.

What can faculty do to help students increase Resilience and Grit?

Looking at that question makes me think back to my own college time and how much teaching faculty has contributed to my success through caring and considerate personal outreach and mentorship. Students are strongly impacted by the interactions they have with their professors. Therefore, it is evident that continued concern and attention within teaching faculty will empower students to thrive.

⁴ Sean McDowell, Ph.D. @seanmcdowell; blog: seanmcdowell.org

In the end – it is all about ACTION and DOING

Increasing students' knowledge about resilience and grit is helpful. However, as one student said "not until I finally implemented and practiced the daily task did I sense the change in myself".

When addressing Resilience and Grit it helps to be blunt and authentic:

"Many students encounter challenges, some more than others – on top of this we have to deal with a pandemic and its consequences. You can quit and give up OR you can become stronger".



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Offer Off and On-campus resources:

- Trauma Resource Institute offers a free App – Ichill can be downloaded on the phone.
- Yoga Nidra – for relaxation
- <https://thewilltochange.com/leadership-mastery-program-for-organizations/grit-and-resilience/>
- <https://positivepsychology.com/5-ways-develop-grit-resilience/>
- <https://mhanational.org/mental-health-month-2021-toolkit-download>