

# **INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL WELLNESS**

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Creating Community  
and Effective Strategies



# PRESENTERS



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# AGENDA

- Current climate
- Recent data and trends
- Strategies to deal with stressors
- Exploring interactive and engaging programming
- What's working
- Resources

# IT'S BEEN A ROLLERCOASTER RIDE...

- March 2020 - Universities shut down in-person learning, international students told to leave campus
- November 2020 - Presidential election and the impact on immigration
- January 2021 - Capital Hill Riots

# PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19

Strain on mental health:

- Immigration/Visas
- Finances
- Housing
- Online learning
- Making and maintaining friends
- Discrimination



Increase levels of:

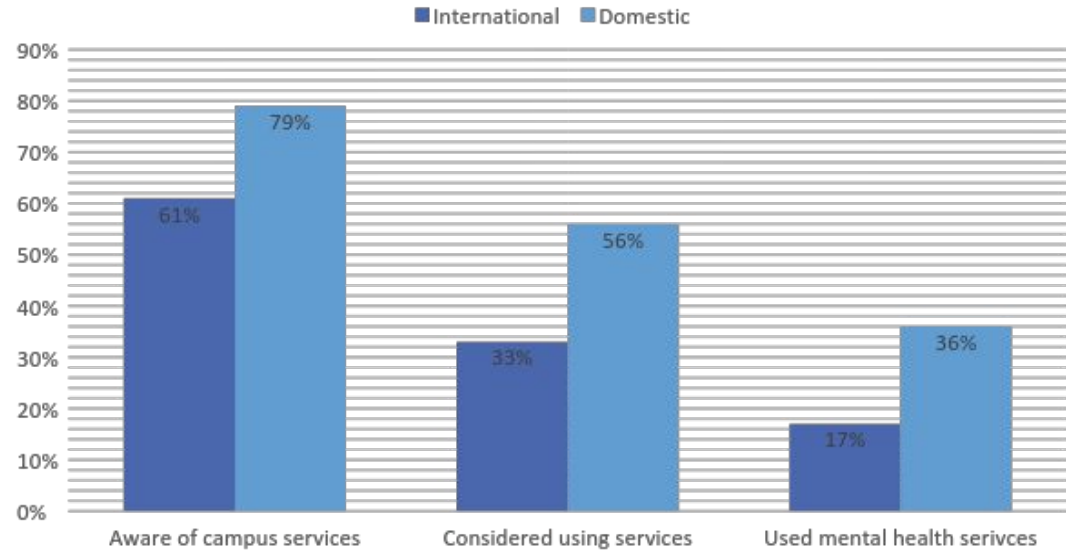
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Loneliness
- Depression
- Post-traumatic stress
- Worry



# **UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH DATA & CHALLENGES**

# MENTAL HEALTH CARE - UNDERUTILIZED

Mental Health Need,  
Awareness, and Use of Counseling  
Services Among International Graduate  
Students,  
Journal of American College Health



Source: Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lusting, 2010

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH PRIOR TO COVID-19

Quantitative study of  
42,428 domestic students  
and 2,423 international  
students from Spring 2017  
ACHA National College  
Health Assessment

Table 2. International student status correlates of mental health diagnoses and symptoms of ACHA-NCHA IIC, Spring 2017.

	International	
	OR	95% CI
Mental health diagnoses		
Depression diagnosis	0.84	0.66–1.06
Anxiety diagnosis	0.47***	0.38–0.58
Depression and anxiety diagnosis	0.58***	0.50–0.67
Other diagnosis	0.72**	0.59–0.87
Mental health symptoms		
Ever felt so depressed that it was difficult to function	1.10*	1.01–1.19
Ever felt overwhelming anxiety	0.69***	0.63–0.74
Ever intentionally cut, burned, bruised, or otherwise injured yourself	0.96	0.83–1.12
Ever seriously considered suicide	0.83**	0.72–0.95
Ever attempted suicide	1.37*	1.04–1.82

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



# BARRIERS TO TREATMENT

- Cost, transportation, access
- Language mismatch
- Mental health interventions poorly adapted for diverse patients
- Provider/diagnostic/systemic bias

## Cultural

- Belief that these are personal weaknesses, not illnesses
- Emotional inhibition, not expression
- Stigma/shame
- Traditional role of psychiatry; low awareness of services
- Communication challenges within families



# COVID-19 STRESSORS UNIQUE TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

## Travel and infection control logistics

- Return to home country or stay in US?
- Travel bans and flight cancellations
- Quarantine in home country—fear of infection, stigma, cost
- Visa appointment cancellations
- Closure of testing centers for TOEFL, IELTS, GRE/GMAT
- Must be in US to apply for OPT

## Learning environment

- Shift to online learning
- Lack of privacy—mental health concerns
- Challenging family dynamics
- Time zones (College Board)
- Is this worth the price of admission?

# ELICITING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' COVID-19 STRESSORS

- Qualitative study of 22 international students from 11 countries and 17 US institutions
- Recruited from larger study of 1,300 young adults' experiences during the pandemic
- Data elicited via tape-recorded semi-structured interviews
- Thematic analysis identified four main stressors, informing pragmatic suggestions for educators

Country of Origin	Gender	Student Status
Argentina	F	Undergraduate
Canada	F	Undergraduate
China (Mainland)	M	Graduate
China (Mainland)	F	Graduate
China (Mainland)	F	Graduate
China (Mainland)	F	Undergraduate
China (Mainland)	F	Graduate
Hong Kong	F	Graduate
India	F	Undergraduate
India	F	Undergraduate
India	F	Graduate
India	F	Undergraduate
India	F	Undergraduate
India	M	Graduate
Japan	F	Undergraduate
Lebanon	F	Graduate
Malaysia	F	Undergraduate
Pakistan	M	Undergraduate
South Korea	F	Graduate
South Korea	F	Graduate
South Korea	F	Graduate
Vietnam	F	Graduate

# FOUR MAJOR THEMES IMPACTING MENTAL HEALTH

Uncertainty and anxiety induced by decisions and policies in response to COVID-19

Limited understanding by educators and school staff of international students' unique challenges

Fears regarding xenophobia

Greater awareness of racial and cultural identity



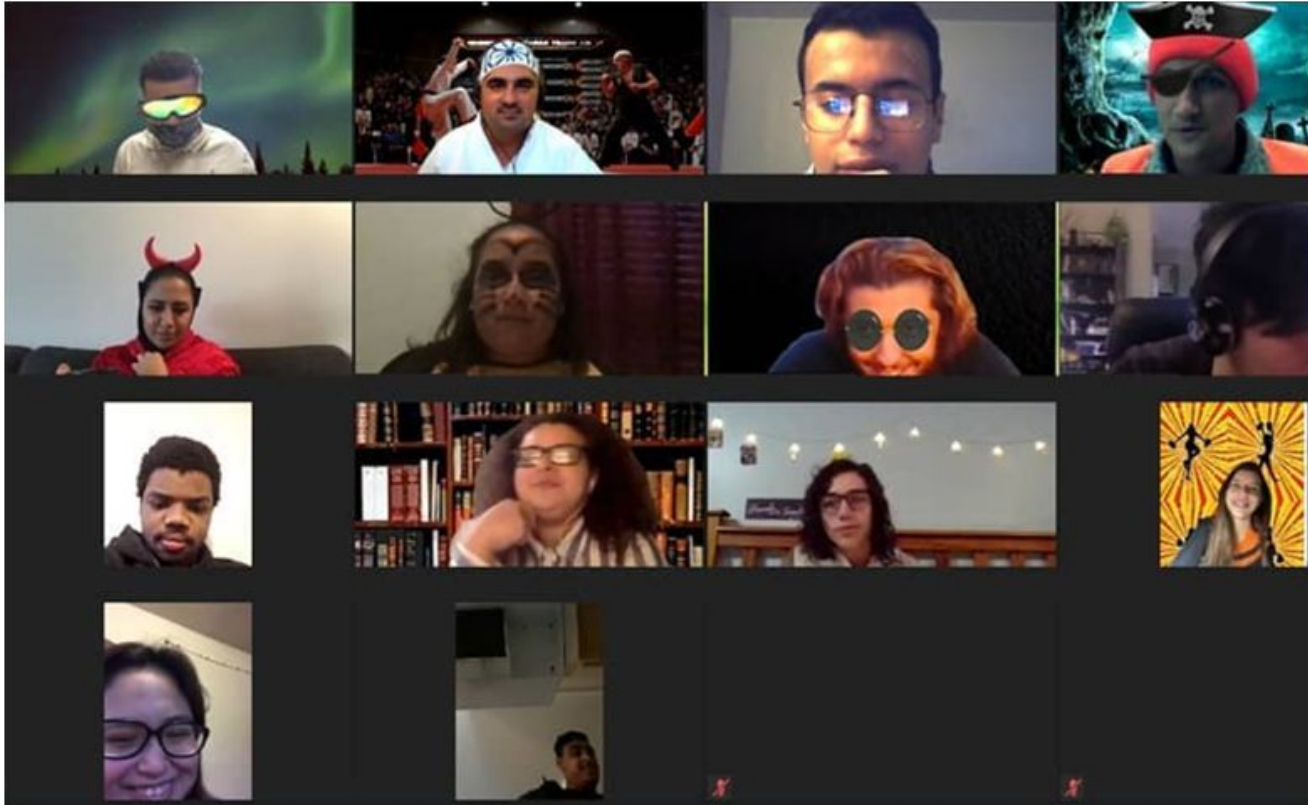
# **EXPLORING INTERACTIVE AND ENGAGING PROGRAMMING**



# Student Organization



# VIRTUAL MEETINGS & CELEBRATIONS



# ONLINE GAMES

Chris Voss Darren Chase Adriana Perez Teresa Mwangi yutaroh View

What is his favorite movie?

7

Kahoot!

Skip

0 Answers

▲ The Hangover

◆ The Waterboy

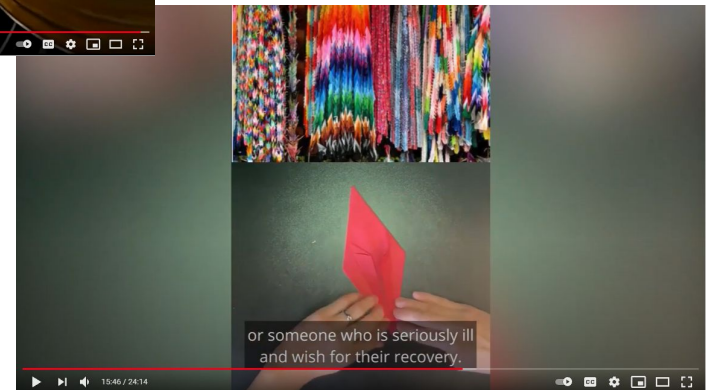
● The Big Lebowski

■ Ted

Mute Stop Video Participants 10 Chat 1 Share Screen Record Reactions Leave

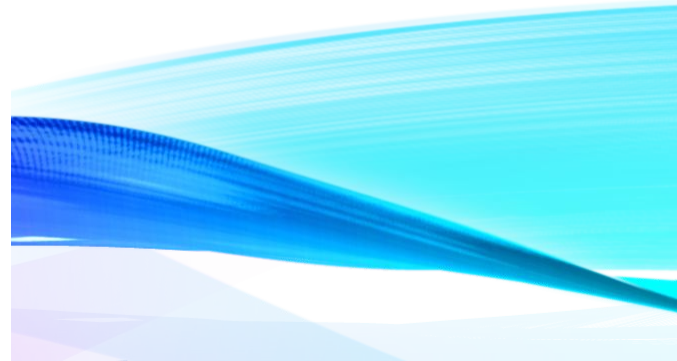


# VIRTUAL EVENTS





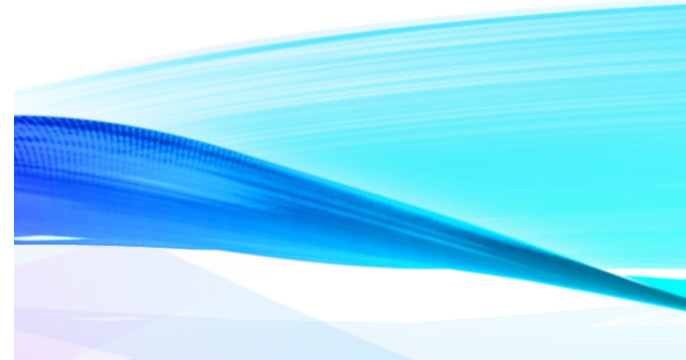
**OUTINGS**







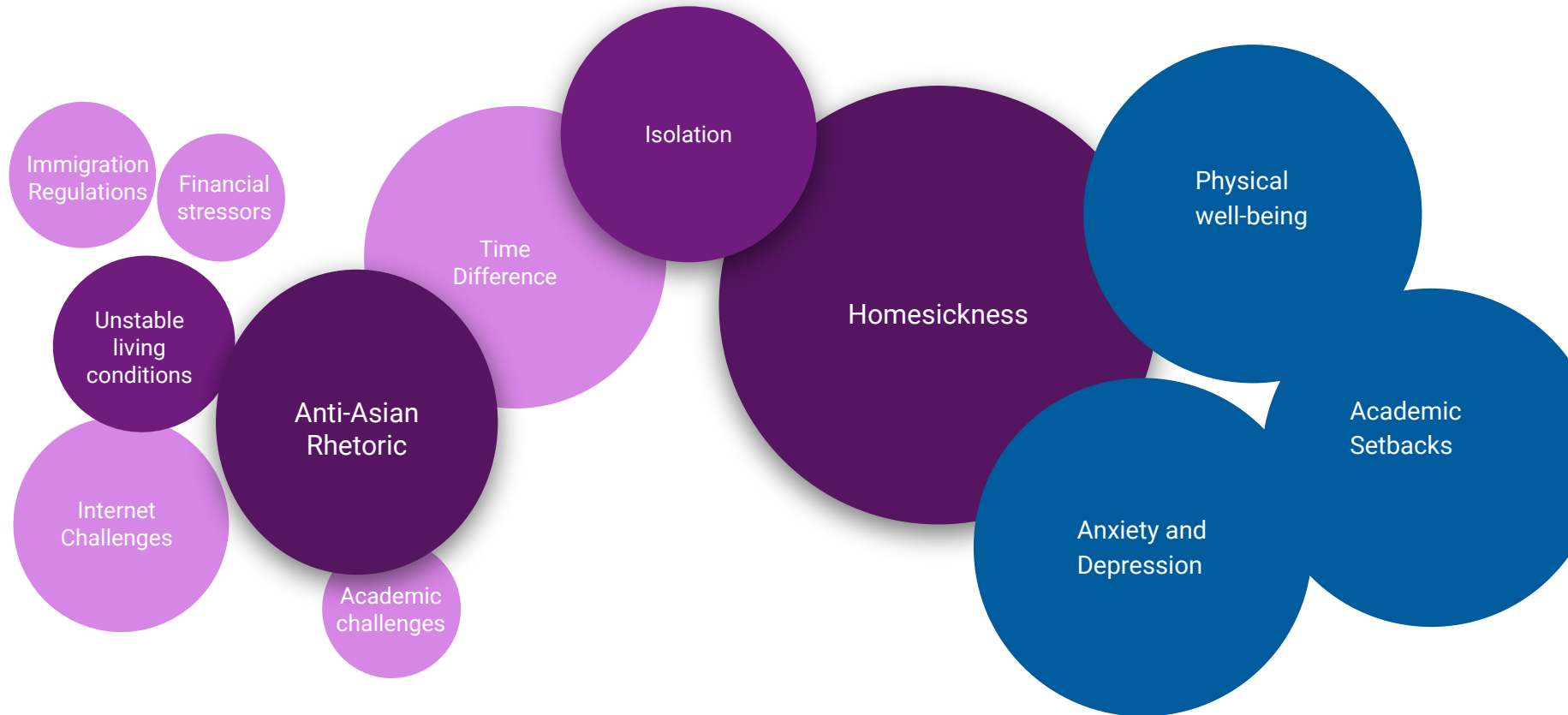
# OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES



# ONGOING STUDENT CONTACT

- Check in
- Important dates
- School activities
- Community activities
- Operational/public health updates
- Whatsapp group

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' STRESSORS





## **Self-actualization**

desire to become the most that one can be

## **Esteem**

respect, self-esteem, status, recognition, strength, freedom

## **Love and belonging**

friendship, intimacy, family, sense of connection

## **Safety needs**

personal security, employment, resources, health, property

## **Physiological needs**

air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, reproduction

# WHAT DID WE LEARN?

## The Pros

- We stayed connected to students
- Students tried to engage with us
- Dropped mental health resources as students passed by
- Direct access to our Personal Counseling staff

## The Cons

- Staffing of socials and events
- Students in different time zones
- Participation = Zoom fatigue
- Mental health access and HIPAA compliance
- Mental health counseling not available outside of the U.S.



# KEY TAKEAWAYS



Find creative ways to collaborate with other stakeholders for virtual programming



Empower students to be aware of their mental wellness and reach out for help during the pandemic



Use challenges as a learning opportunity



Create a robust virtual programming process which includes at least one to two programs each month



Create opportunities to celebrate wins during the pandemic; opportunities for student spotlights



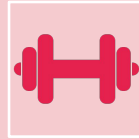
Scale student support and normalize help-seeking behavior by expanding the use of peer coaches and mentors



# NOW WHAT?



In reviewing the frequency of Wellness programs at your institution, is there some room to grow as far as how often you offer some of the programs?



Consider your current campus mapping, do you have a fairly well rounded mix of existing wellness related programs that you can use as opportunities to further develop and grow international students' acceptance of mental wellness and decrease the negative connotation that is prevalent in this cohort?



Are you using your existing technology resources to create platforms which can increase knowledge around wellness options for international students?



Have you reached out to your international student population to find out what their stressors are during this pandemic?



# RESOURCES & HOTLINES

# EMOTIONAL & MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING PROGRAMS



## Powerpoint Presentation

Professionally designed presentation to walk your students through the training.



## Video Content

Two videos on mental health awareness and student perceptions on culture shock and stress from around the world.



## Student Handout

A downloadable student guide take-away, or we can supply hard copies, to distribute to students.



## Interactive Activities

Activities that encourage dialogue on many of the larger issues such as myths surround seeking help.



## Proctor Guide

Complete guide to walk you or your staff through the training, including a full script and talking points.



In partnership with:



The MGH Center for  
Cross-Cultural Student  
Emotional Wellness



INTERNATIONAL  
STUDENT  
INSURANCE

<https://administrators.internationalstudentinsurance.com/resources/>

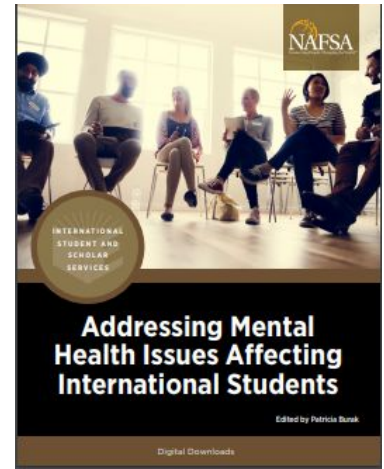
# RESOURCES

## NAFSA Resources

- [Addressing Mental Health Issues Affecting International Students](#)
- [Crisis Management in a Cross Cultural Setting: ISSS](#)

## Other Resources

- [Massachusetts General Hospital Center for Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness \(MGH CCCSEW\)](#)
- [Tufts University Counseling and Mental Health Service](#)
- Information for international students regarding counseling
- [Emotional Wellness During the COVID-19 Outbreak for International Students](#)



# SERVICES & HOTLINES

## Hotlines

National Suicide Prevention

1-800-273-TALK

[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

The National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-SAFE

<http://www.thehotline.org/>

It Gets Better Project (LGBTQ)

1-866-4-U-TREVOR

[www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/get-help](http://www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/get-help)

## Services

Crisis Text Line

<http://www.crisistextline.org/>

Text 741-741





**THANK YOU**