

Exploring the Emotional Wellness of International Students During COVID-19



Presenters



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International Student Insurance (ISI)

- Current climate & overview of impact
- New data emerges finding new trends
- Understanding new mental health challenges
- Strategies to deal with these new stressors
- Exploring interactive and engaging programming
- Resources

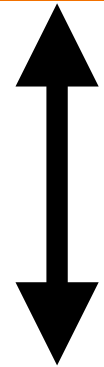
Agenda



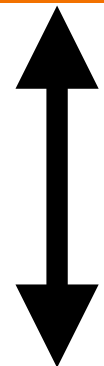
Current Climate & Overview of the Impact



March 2020



November 2020



January 2021

Announcement from universities to temporarily close school. International students were asked to leave campus.

Presidential election, and its impact on any upcoming changes on immigration regulation.

The Capitol Hill Riot, facing continuous violence, fear and insecure feelings.

Rollercoaster Experience

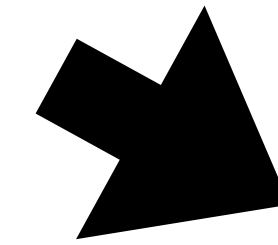


Psychological Consequences of COVID-19



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 New Mental Health Data & Challenges



Opinion | CONTRIBUTING OP-ED WRITER

Chinese, Studying in America, and Struggling

[查看简体中文版](#) | [查看繁體中文版](#)

By HELEN GAO DEC. 12, 2017



Matt Chase

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

Structural

- 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

Derr AS. Psychiatr Serv. 2016 67(3): 265–274.
Yeung A, Kung W. Psychiatric News. 2004; 21(1): 34-36.
Kim BSK, Omizo MM. Couns. Psychol. 2003; 31:343–46.



COVID-19 stressors unique to international students

- Travel and infection control logistics
 - Return to home country or stay in US?
 - Travel bans and flight cancelations
 - Quarantine in home country—fear of infection, stigma, cost
 - Visa appointment cancelations
 - 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?
 - In China: “云上课” (cloud class), “云留学” (cloud study abroad), “云毕业” (cloud graduation)



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

Greater awareness of racial and cultural identity

Fears regarding xenophobia

Four Major Recommendations

- Acknowledge the challenges of the current moment with empathy
- Support anti-racism efforts and educate international students on race and racism
- Gain basic knowledge regarding visa policies and regulations, including knowing what resources to offer students
- Create shared affinity spaces and increase psychoeducation targeted toward international students to promote resilience



Strategies to Deal with these New Stressors



Acceptance

Connection matters

Build and maintain structure

Celebrate small wins

Self Compassion

Stress Reduction

Seek professional help

International Students



International Advisors and School Leaders

A woman with curly hair and glasses, smiling, standing at a podium in a lecture hall. The background is a warm, orange-toned image of a lecture hall with rows of seats.

Acknowledge the difficulties and challenges, letting students feel that they were seen and heard

Consider giving students “care packages”

Train staff on campus regarding unique challenges that international students are facing

Develop program to promote connections among international students

Consider developing programs on building resiliency skill

Be aware of zoom fatigue, and be creative on recruiting (e.g. giving incentives)

Provide resources and encourage students to seek professional help

When to Refer

- Deterioration in Personal Hygiene or Dress
- Dramatic Weight Loss or Gain
- Noticeable Changes in Mood
- Excessive Absences
- Academic Problems
- Social Isolation and Unusual Behaviors
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse
- Threat of Harm to Themselves or Others



How to Refer

- Address common myth about mental health
- Introduce counseling
- Make the call together, or send an email to help form a connection
- Make no assumptions and ask their provider preference
- Build a relationship with the Counseling Center and off campus providers



Counseling Resources

- Teletherapy during pandemic
- Services at Counseling Centers
- Local off campus providers
- Psychology Today website:
 - <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>



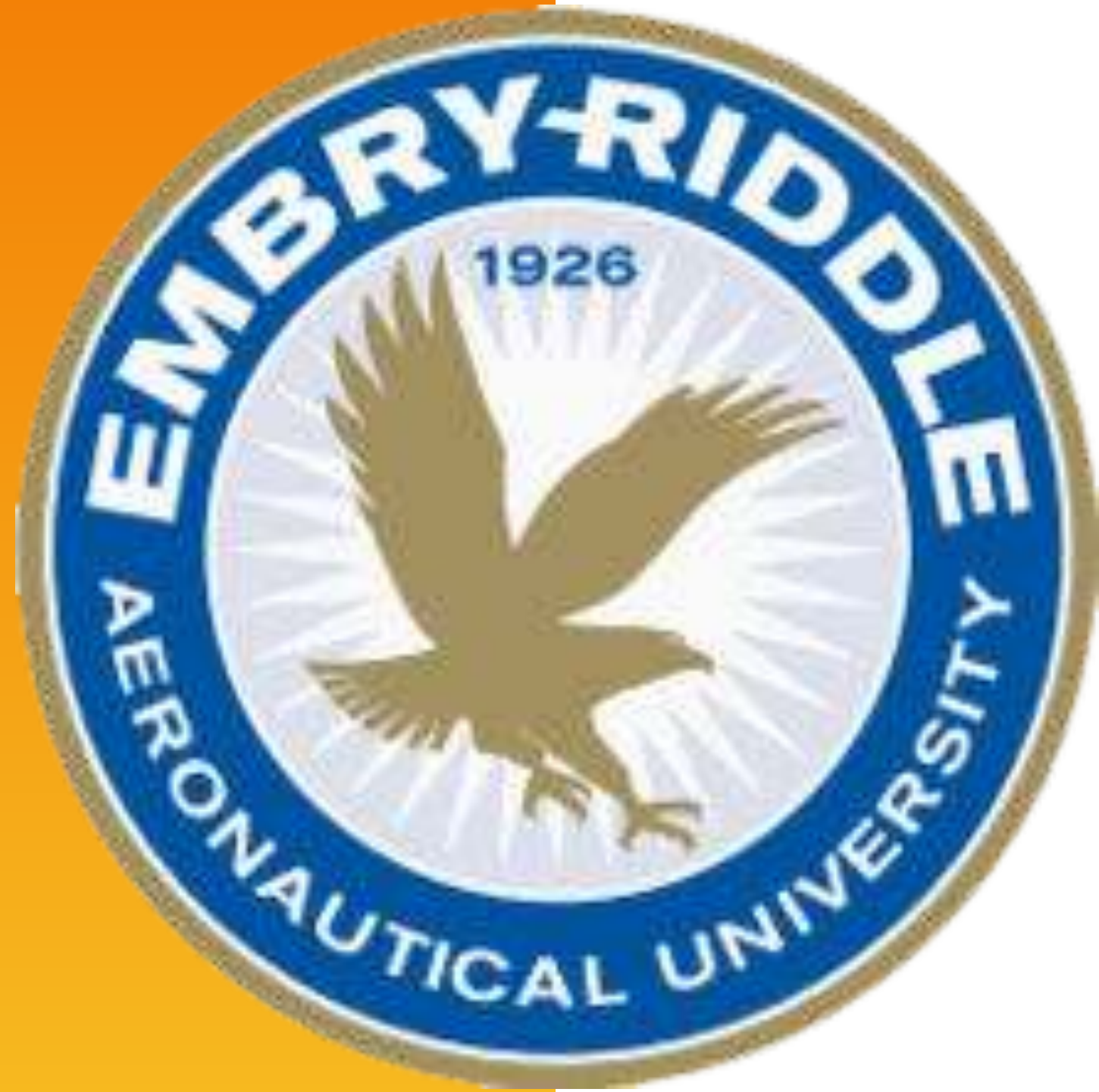
After the Referral

- Set a reminder to follow-up with the student
- Ask questions:
 - How did the visit go?
 - Do you have a follow-up appointment?
- Be sure to listen, and see if any barriers
- Encourage to go consistently
- Counseling is voluntary



Exploring Interactive and Engaging Programming





COVID 19 Stressors of International students @ ERAU

Survey Results

Takeaways from our survey:

- 77.4% of survey participants said they were greatly impacted by the pandemic. They experienced feelings of fear/worry and uncertainty about immigration policies and ability to return to the US should they leave the US (homesickness)
 - Find out from students where they feel the most safe.
 - Provide current updates to students as it pertains to compliance



Takeaways from our survey:

- Survey participants experienced stress about financial difficulty and academic stress (online classes)
 - Myths surrounding F2F vs online classes
 - Economic hardship application and external/internal scholarship resources



Takeaways from our survey:

- 25.5% of survey participants found they support programs and resources provided very effective, while 49.1 % of them found it somewhat effective
- 25.4% of survey participants either found the programming not so effective or not effective at all



The Task

- Identify and review programs, practices, resources, and strategies
- Analyze the challenges institutions face
- Investigate factors related to the access to mental health services and support for international student wellbeing
- Collaborate with other campus stakeholders to support student wellness (Counselling & wellness center, Dean of students, SGA, various student groups)
- Produce a wellness committee that will be intentional in resources for international students
- There are no one size fits all solutions: Don't offer only generalized offerings



Engagement & Programming



- Daily Let's Teletalk: Consultations available Monday through Friday
- Workshop Topics: Coping with COVID-19, Managing Loss, anxiety
- Meditation Mondays - Students receive 15 minutes meditation sessions (both virtual and in person options available)
- International student "buddy" mentorship program
- Multilingual Counselling sessions: Morneau Shepell



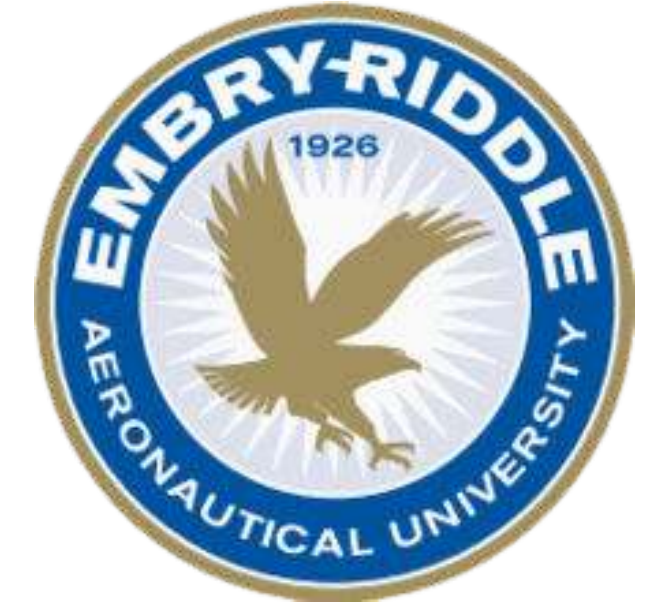
Engagement & Programming



- Project call a student. Outreach, Checking in students' wellbeing with "check in" phone calls
- Wellness Wednesdays - students receive wellness tips from a counselor through Instagram live
- Grief and loss support provided by Counselling center
- Zumba and Full moon Yoga sessions



Engagement & Programming



- Live Virtual cooking sessions
- Khahoot, Jeopardy & Trivia game sessions
- Utilizing social media platforms; Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok
- Food Pantry - provides food for students facing food insecurity. Items are bagged and provided in designated areas around campus.



Now What?

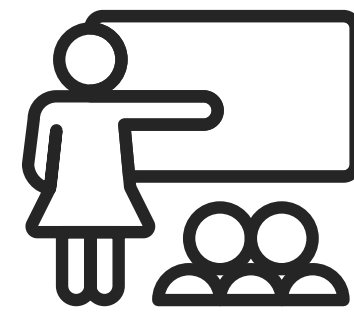
- In reviewing the frequency of Wellness programs at your institution, is there some room to grow as far as how often you offer some of the programs?
- Consider your current campus mapping, do you have a fairly well rounded mix of existing wellness related programs that you can use as opportunities to 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 we 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?



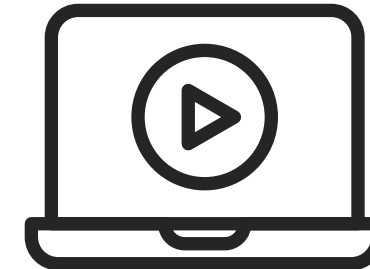
Resources and Hotlines



Emotional & Mental Health Training Program



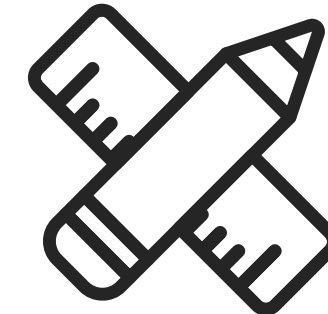
Powerpoint Presentation



Video Content



Student Handout



Interactive Activities



Proctor Guide



**INTERNATIONAL
STUDENT
INSURANCE**

Massachusetts General Hospital Center for Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness *Consortium*

- Monthly lecture-discussions: Monthly Consortium-wide videoconferences on select high-priority topics within cross-cultural student mental health, including presentations by our Center's expert clinicians, facilitated discussion, and Q&A
- Case conferences: Consortium-wide videoconference discussions on anonymized real-life cases and other current issues raised by member schools, facilitated by our Center's clinicians; all member schools are invited to bring cases and questions
- Meeting transcripts: Summaries of key insights, resources, and recommendations emerging from monthly Consortium calls, for dissemination among member schools' campus staff
- Internet forum: A private Consortium forum for year-round engagement with other member schools and our Center's clinicians, with email and digest options available
- Exclusive content access: Early and unlimited access to premium CCCSEW content online—including fact sheets, publications, and videos
- Peer community: A community of peers from other schools' administrative, educational, and clinical staff
- Seat at the CCCSEW Table: A leadership role in guiding the direction of the CCCSEW's work and content and future Consortium offerings



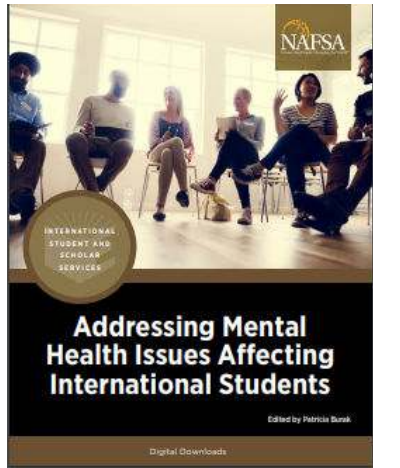
The MGH Center for Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness

More information about the Consortium can be found at: <https://www.mghstudentwellness.org/consortium>

Resources

NAFSA Resources

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



Other Resources

- [Tufts University Counseling and Mental Health Service](#)
 - Information for international students regarding counseling
- [Emotional Wellness During the COVID-19 Outbreak for International Students](#)
 - <https://www.internationalstudentinsurance.com/explained/>

Services and Hotlines

Hotlines

- National Suicide Prevention
 - 1-800-273-TALK
 - 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

Services

- Crisis Text Line
 - <http://www.crisistextline.org/>
 - Text 741-741



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Thank you!

