


# Understanding Stress Among Students in Different Academic Programs



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These slides are available from  
[www.alice.columbia.edu](http://www.alice.columbia.edu)

# How College Students from Historically Underrepresented Groups and Different Academic Programs Experience and Cope with Stress



The attendee should be able to:

1. Describe key sources and consequences of stress, coping strategies and resources among various groups of college students (including students from historically underrepresented groups and different academic programs).
2. Identify qualitative and quantitative methods used in defining stress, and sources of, among college students.
3. Discuss implications of findings and models used in conducting assessment and strategic planning to reduce the negative impact of stress among students.

# Overview



- Identification of stress as a priority
- Understanding of stress on campus
- Assessment of the issue
- Initial efforts
- Next steps

# Identification of Stress as an Issue

A silhouette of a human head in profile, facing left. Inside the head, there are several icons: a lightbulb, a gear, a pencil, and a stack of books. The background is a light blue gradient.

- Stress is a vague term –difficult to define and measure
- Prolonged stress depletes the body's resources and can have consequences for a person's emotional and physical health
- Stress is not a fixed state but a multi-phased process with interacting cognitive, behavioral, and physiological components
- Transactional perspectives of stress emphasize the interactions between appraisal, coping, and environment

# Understanding Stress on Campus



- Literature provides no universal definition of stress
- Students could not fully agree on a definition of stress
- Student wanted to focus on coping rather than defining stress

# Assessment of the Issue



- Students perceive stress as ingrained in the culture of Columbia and as an expectation.
- Stress is a unifying experience and the only commonality (norm) across all schools with which students can identify.
- They would like to see the culture change but none are willing to take this on because their time here is transient. They also believe that students following them should have to experience the same stress that they did (“rite of passage” concept).

# Received versus Desired Health Information



| Received Information from the Institution | Columbia University |          |
|---|---------------------|----------|
|   | UNDERGRADUATE       | GRADUATE |
| Stress Reduction                          | 50.5                | 41.1     |

| Desired Information from the Institution | Columbia University |          |
|--|---------------------|----------|
|  | UNDERGRADUATE       | GRADUATE |
| Stress Reduction                         | 63.9                | 58.1     |

# ACHA-NCHA Data



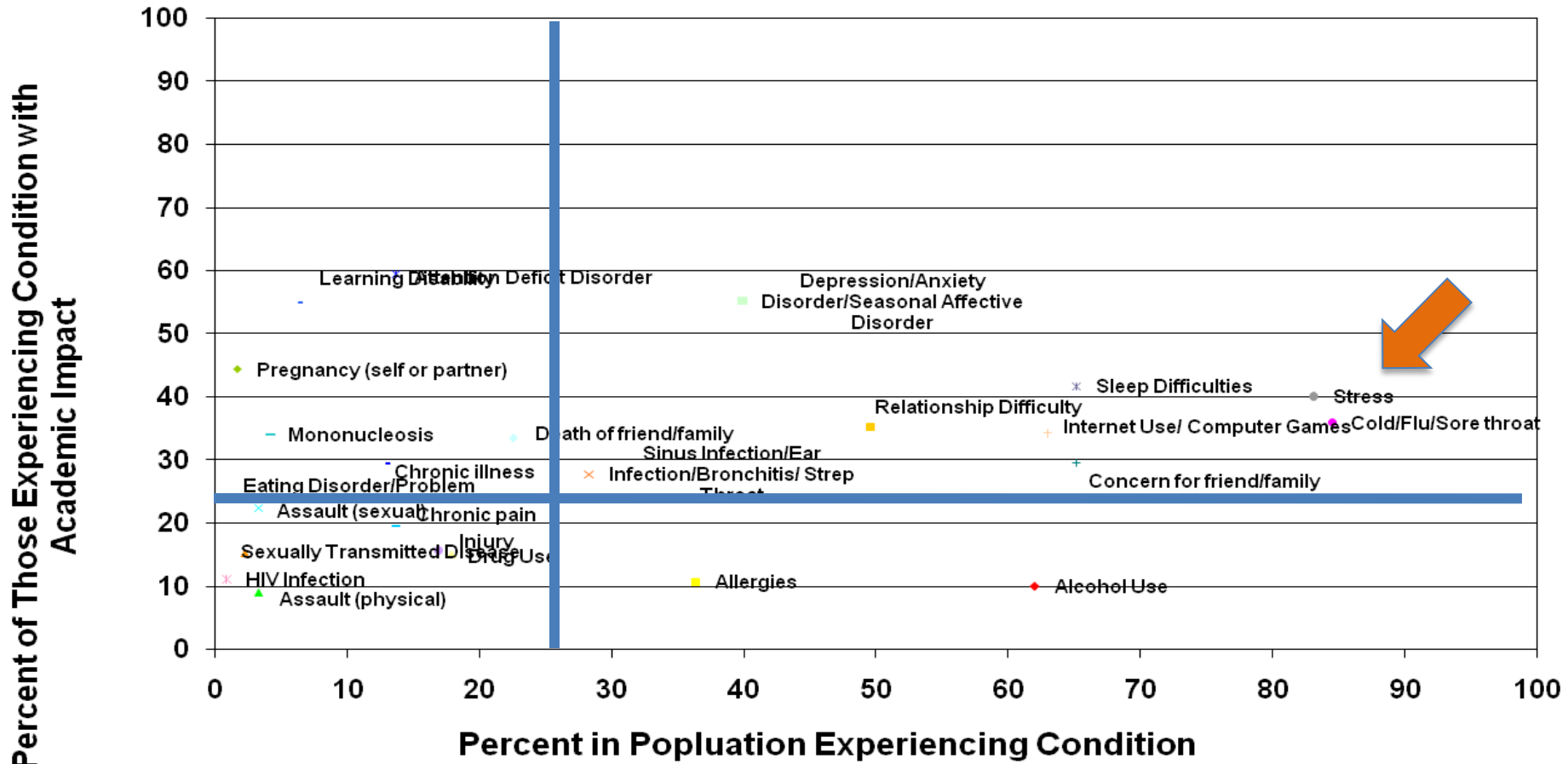
|        | Columbia University             |   |                                 |   |
|--------|---------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|
|        | Undergraduate                   |   | Graduate                        |   |
|        | Experienced<br>... in last year | Of those<br>experiencing<br>... had an<br>academic<br>impact* | Experienced<br>... in last year | Of those<br>experiencing<br>... had an<br>academic<br>impact* |
| Stress | 77                              | 38  | 72                              | 29  |

\*A negative academic impact is defined as receiving a lower grade on an exam or project, receiving a lower grade in a course, receiving an incomplete or dropping a course, or significant disruption in thesis, dissertation, research or practicum work.

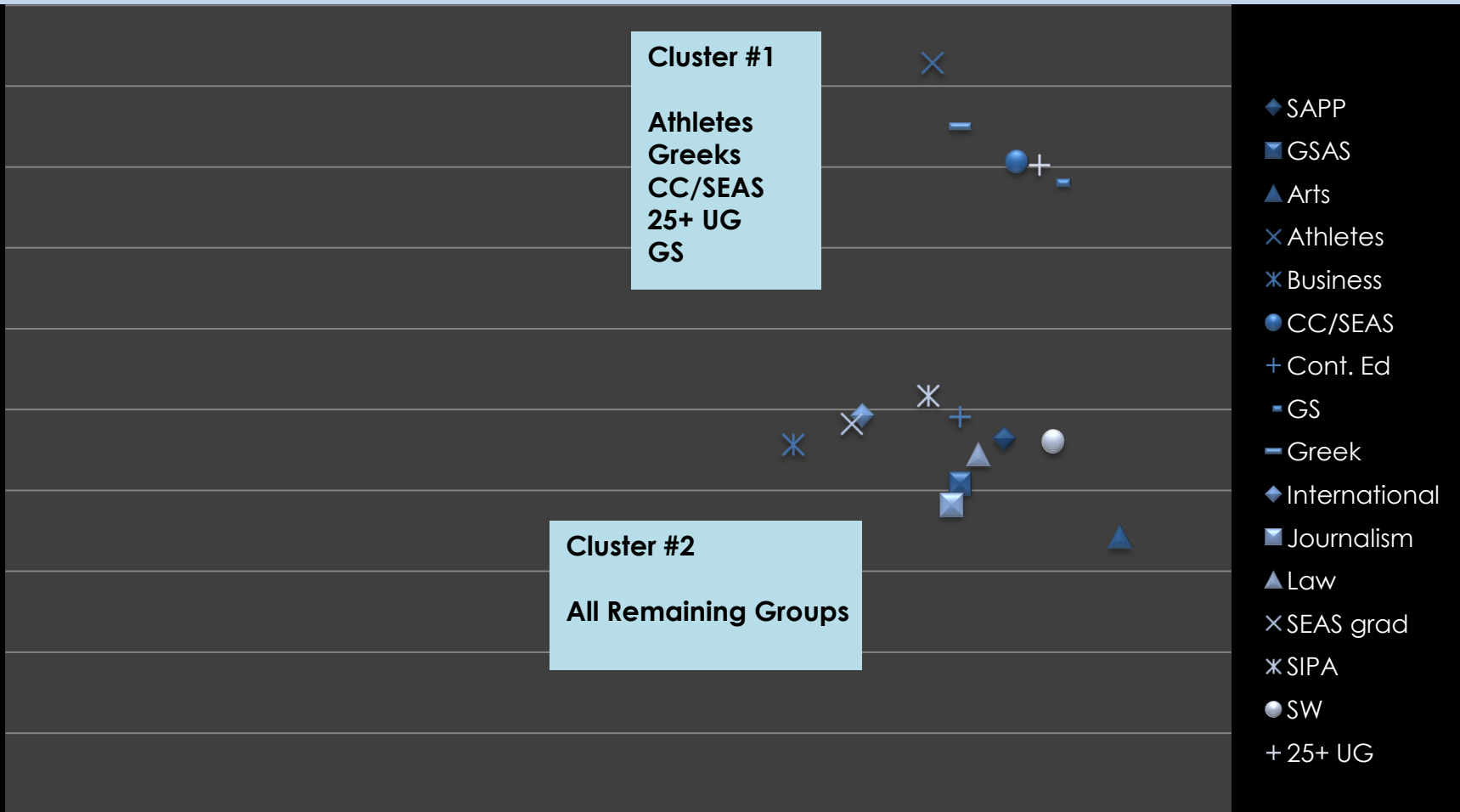
# Negative Academic Impacts



## Undergraduate Students



# ACHA-NCHA Data



**Experience and Academic Impact**

# ACHA-NCHA Data



| The percentage of students reporting experiencing the following causes of stress in the last 30 days | Columbia University |          |
|--|---------------------|----------|
|  | UNDERGRADUATE       | GRADUATE |
| Noise in my living environment   | 34.2                | 26.0     |
| Noise in my study environment  | 33.3                | 26.8     |
| Cluttered living environment   | 39.1                | 33.3     |
| Air quality in my living environment   | 23.9                | 18.4     |
| Lighting in my living environment  | 26.7                | 20.1     |
| Lighting in my study environment   | 23.8                | 18.8     |
| Physical distance between my living environment and classes  | 21.6                | 23.9     |
| Availability of healthy food choices on campus   | 40.5                | 28.0     |
| Availability of study space on campus  | 28.7                | 24.0     |
| Availability of space to relax and hang out on campus  | 26.3                | 22.2     |
| University administrative processes  | 45.6                | 39.3     |
| Witnessed discrimination on campus   | 11.3                | 8.2      |
| Population density on campus   | 13.8                | 15.2     |

# Initial Efforts



The overall goals of the program are to (1) define and measure student stress, and (2) reduce the negative impacts of student stress at Columbia University.

- **Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)**
- **Asset-based (positive coping)**
- **Social marketing effort**

# Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)



- The project was not introduced as one addressing stress. Students were asked to describe whatever health-related issues they thought most strongly affected their student community; stress was predicted to naturally emerge as a leading issue.
- Community group discussions & focus groups
- Four themes:
  - Causes of stress
  - Effects of stress
  - Control over stress
  - Culture of stress

# Focus Group Themes by School



| Academic Unit | Columbia College/SEAS   | School of General Studies                    | Graduate School of Business                          | Teachers College  |
|---------------|---|--|--|---|
| Common Themes | Academic/School<br>Finances<br>Relationships<br>Time Management | Academic/School<br>Finances<br>Relationships | Academic/School<br>Finances<br>Time Management       | Academic/School<br>Finances<br>Relationships<br>Time Management |
| Unique Themes | Social Circle   | Future Goals                                 | New Social Dynamics<br>Location Adjustment<br>Career | Housing   |

# Coping Strategy by School



| Academic Unit       | Columbia College/SEAS  | School of General Studies | Graduate School of Business | Teachers College      |
|---------------------|--|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Top Coping Strategy | Interpersonal Support<br><br>Physical Activity<br><br>(tied score) | Physical Activity         | Physical Activity           | Interpersonal Support |
| Number Two          | see above  | Interpersonal Support     | Interpersonal Support       | Physical Activity     |

# Social Marketing

Question:

How do you cope with stress?

Messages:

“I do physical activity”

“I prioritize and organize my schedule”

“I take a nap”

“I listen to music”

“I spend time with friends”



Messages selected by students using [allourideas.org](http://allourideas.org)

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# Next steps



- Evaluation of initial social marketing efforts
- Analysis of Spring 2011 ACHA-NCHA Data
- School-specific messages
- Integration of stress with other health promotion efforts on campus

# Future-Orientation Sample



| Programmatic Area        | Concepts   | Integration Strategy  | Targeted Messaging   | Theoretical Justification                                |
|--------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| <b>Physical activity</b> | Engaging in regular physical activity contributes to reducing stress<br>Physical activity contributes to improved quality of focus and concentration, which can reduce academic-related stress<br>Positive coping mechanism for stress | <i>Stage-based motivational emails;</i><br><i>Promotion of CU Move as exercise and stress relief program;</i><br><i>Incentives related to stress relief;</i><br><i>Promoting non-traditional concepts of physical activity (i.e. walking)</i>   | Selected messaging: "I do physical activity"                                     | Self-efficacy/SCT<br>TTM                                 |
| <b>Relationships</b>     | Difficult interpersonal relationships as contributors to stress<br>Seeking help from interpersonal relationships as a positive coping mechanism for stress   | TBD   | Selected messaging: "I spend time with friends"                                  | Self-efficacy/SCT  |
| <b>Sleep</b>             | Lack of sleep as a contributor to stress<br>Positive sleep behavior associated with reducing stress  | Feedback on sleep assessment incorporates positive stress coping skills and suggestions   | Selected messaging: "I take a nap"   | TTM  |
| <b>Go Ask Alice!</b>     | Q&A related to coping with stress  | Promote relevant Q&A at events, on Facebook page, etc.<br><a href="#">Stress, anxiety, and learning to cope</a><br><a href="#">Exercise motivation for stress reduction</a><br><a href="#">Drinking for stress relief - a problem?</a><br><a href="#">Fall asleep faster</a><br><a href="#">Procrastination</a><br><a href="#">Stressed out and anxious about schoolwork and everything</a> | Selected messaging: "I prioritize and organize my schedule", "I listen to music" | Michael P. McNeil<br>ACHA Annual Meeting<br>June 3, 2011 |

# Contact Me



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