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"A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work"

**USE OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICES AND CLASSROOM RITUALS OF
CONNECTION TO REDUCE IMPACT OF STRESS IN SOCIAL WORK
STUDENTS**

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Abstract

Contemporary social work students experience multiple stressors that impact their ability to effectively learn the practice of social work. This qualitative study examined student perceptions of primary sources and impacts of stress, as well as the coping mechanisms they used to mediate stress. Ten themes emerged in students' accounts of how they experience stress in their lives. Student spirituality was found to have a positive impact on student ability to cope with stress and classroom rituals of connection surfaced as an important factor in easing the effects of student stress in the classroom.

Use of Spiritual Practices and Classroom Rituals of Connection to Reduce Impact of Stress in Social Work Students

Introduction

“I quit school once a day!” This comment made by a senior student in a social work class was greeted by the boisterous laughter of agreement and enthusiastic assent. The students involved were participating in an animated conversation about the many ways that stress impacted their daily existence. The discussion was intimate at times and raucous at others, as students reveled in the opportunity to vent their frustrations and enjoy a few moments of mutual catharsis.

The fact that college students experience significant levels of stress which impair their ability to learn and succeed in their role as students has been well documented in literature (Hudd, Dumlao, Erdmann-Sager, & Murray, 2000; Humphrey & McCarthy, 1998; Sarafino & Ewing, 1999; Nonis, Hudson, Logan, & Ford, 1998). Stress has been linked to depression, anxiety, physical illness and student “burnout” (Sarafino, et. al, 1999; Nonis, et. al., 1998). Numerous factors contribute to this finding.

Research indicates that contemporary students are stressed by their financial responsibilities (Crissman-Ishler, 2005), often being forced to get large loans and work at least part-time in order to stay enrolled in college (Hawkins, Smith, Hawkins, & Grant, 2005). Off-campus employment has been shown to be negatively correlated with high GPA, satisfaction with college, and completion of degree in BSW students, and positively correlated with feeling overwhelmed (Hawkins, et. al, 2005).

For a significant portion of students this creates role conflict which has been cited as a primary source of student stress (Home, 1998). Marlow (1992) reported that 72% of traditional

BSW students and 62.5% of non-traditional BSW students reported conflict between their student role and work role. Sixty-three percent of students said that working reduced their study hours and one third reported that their work interfered with their academic pursuits.

Other factors associated with high stress in undergraduates include poor time management and poor health behaviors (Hudd, Dumlao, Erdmann-Sager, Murray, Phan, Soukas, and Yoksuka, 2000). One study noted that when students perceived that they had little control of their time, they demonstrated diminished problem solving ability, more health related ailments, and generally increased personal stress (Nonis, Hudson, Logan, & Ford, 1998). In contrast, Misra and McKean (2000) and Humphrey and McCarthy (1998) found that good time-management and organizational skills decreased academic stress.

While numerous studies have examined factors contributing to student stress, there is a paucity of research that examines student stress from the vantage point of the students themselves. A serious disadvantage of quantitative methods in these efforts is that while correlations may identify associations, it is nearly impossible to determine the direction of the associations, resulting in the time-old question of which came first, the chicken or the egg.

A qualitative study conducted in the Fall of 2005 by the authors examined student stress in the ethnographic tradition, observing student language, behavior, and culture as it relates to stress and eliciting the students' own stories regarding the way they experienced stress, the impact it had on them, and the methods they used to cope. Stress was defined as "perceived pressure upon the individual, [encompassing] the tripartite relationship between demands on the individual, their feelings about the demands and their ability to cope with those demands" (Radcliffe & Lester, 2003, p. 33). The purpose of the study was to explore students' perceptions of their primary sources of stress and how that stress impacted their academic performance,

health, and sense of well-being. In the process of examining the sources and impacts of stress on students' lives, spirituality emerged as an important theme in the way students managed the stress in their lives. In addition, rituals of connection appeared to play a significant role in reducing stress in the classroom.

Spirituality in students has been linked to greater satisfaction with life (Fabricatore, Handal, and Fenzel, 2000), increased internal coping strengths, and employment of positive coping mechanisms to deal with stress (Graham, Furr, Flowers, & Burke, 2001; Kampa, 2000). Additionally, Kampa (2000) found that students' spiritual health contributed to improved contentedness and self esteem.

The significance of "rituals of connection" in family work has been well documented. The practice has been linked to marital satisfaction, parent-child attachment and bonding, security, and child well-being (Doherty, 1999; Keiser, 2005). Doherty (1999), characterizes family rituals as repeated and coordinated activities that have significance or meaning for the family. They create connection and a sense of family identity as well as offer families stability during times of stress and transition. They are distinguished from family routines in that they are symbolic and involve an "affective commitment that leaves the individual feeling that the activity has a felt rightness and provides a sense of belonging" (Fiese, Tomcho, Douglas, Josephs, Poltrock & Baker, 2002, p.382). In educational literature, much has been said about the importance of creating connections between faculty and students (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Tiberius, R. G., 1993) as well as developing a "community of learners." A community of learners has been defined as a group of people with "a shared purpose, good communication, and a climate with justice, discipline, caring, and occasions for celebration" (Boyer, 1995). Based on the authors' observations of students during the Fall of 2005 and subsequently, developing

classroom rituals creates a strong sense of shared purpose, facilitates student sense of belonging and safety, and reduces student anxiety.

Methodology

Researchers utilized a convenience sample of undergraduate social work students enrolled in two institutions in the Southeast. One is a private, liberal arts college with approximately 2,300 students; the other is a large university boasting 43,000 students. Students currently enrolled in social work classes from both settings were included in the study.

Most were 18-24 years old and female, with approximately 6% males. The population was diverse with 31% of the students having multicultural backgrounds including: African American, Caribbean, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, Portuguese and Native American. Most students (60%) were working and going to school. Students in each year of the social work program were represented. See Table 1 for a description of the demographics of the sample population.

Table 1. Demographics of Sample

n=124	Sex	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Marital Status	Children	Employment Status	Year
	F= 117 M= 7	18-24 yrs= 92 25-31 yrs= 10 32-38 yrs= 5 39-45 yrs= 4 46-52 yrs= 2 53-58 yrs= 1	White= 78 Black=18 Hispanic= 16 Asian=1 Pac. Islander= 1 Portuguese= 2 Native American= 1	Married= 13 Single=86 Other= 4	Yes=11 No=64	Full-time= 19 Part-time= 56 Not employed= 36	1 st = 45 2 nd =11 3 rd = 20 4 th = 40

Researchers engaged in participant observation of the BSW students on campus, including:

- observing verbal and non-verbal interactions in various settings where faculty could observe or interact with students outside the classroom

- observing open-ended discussions within classroom settings as well as student comments and behavior outside directed discussions
- review of transcripts of student directed interviews

The power differential between faculty and students was acknowledged as problematic and efforts were made to note any concerns. Efforts were made to mollify the impact of that power discrepancy by including student directed interviews in the data collected. It was noted that students tended to talk more about their relationships in the student led interviews and focus on academics in interviews with faculty; however, the discussion in both types of interviews included similar content.

Results

During field observations, researchers noted that students' stress was a frequent topic of conversation. Students could be overheard talking about their stress levels, their workload, their lack of sleep and their upcoming deadlines with surprising regularity. At the beginning of class periods faculty frequently heard comments from students in casual conversation about how stressed and tired they were. In one skills class, which customarily began with a ritual "feelings check," the instructor noted that without fail one half to two thirds of the class reported feeling stressed in some way.

When approached about participating in the stress study, several classes appeared to be what can best be described as jubilant at the opportunity to talk about their stress levels. Researchers at the liberal arts university were surprised at the number of students who volunteered to do intensive interviews as well as participate in class discussions and observations. Class discussions were punctuated by frequent laughter and spirited conversation as student comments circulated the room and one student's experience inspired the telling of new

stories and accounts. Many students reported that the discussions had reduced their sense of being stressed and overwhelmed.

Patterns in the discussions revealed that there were certain themes that emerged repeatedly. Although it was often difficult to ascertain which themes were sources of stress, and which represented the impact of stress on students' lives, ten clear themes surfaced in student accounts. These ten themes are discussed below. Student quotations were selected on the basis of their representativeness of the general experiences, attitudes, and thoughts expressed.

Sources of Stress

Juggling Roles. The majority of students indicated that they were working at least part time while going to school and maintaining various roles in their families. One student stated that she had numerous roles including student, intern, friend, daughter, sister and aunt. She said, "You're working on one thing, and all you can think about is the other." Another student reported that "My different roles move my stress to levels that I didn't know even existed."

Finances. Financial pressures were a consistent source of stress for many of the students.

"It's about tuition, car payments, insurance, eating... I don't really have a choice" (about working).

Trouble with budgeting money was also discussed as a source of stress.

"Finances are a huge stress. I don't know how to do this. I had to apply for loans. I'm waiting for loans to come through now. My parents did all of this before. I don't know what I'm doing. My dad laughs and says, 'you're 22, and you should know how to do this.' I've never had to think about any of this before."

Relationships. A continual theme that emerged in conversations with students centered on the stress caused by various relationships. While for many students, family provided a major source of emotional support, family was also a primary contributor of stress.

One junior stated,

“My family has lots of problems. A semester where nothing happens would be a miracle. I hear things, but I’m not there, and I can’t do anything to help. That really stresses me out.”

During the course of covering content regarding family dynamics, many students approached the professor to discuss how difficult the material had been for them personally. One student shared, “This is the first time I’ve realized how dysfunctional my family really is.” Another confided how painful it was for her when she struggled to find any strengths in her family system: “I was so angry because I couldn’t think of a single family strength!”

Those students with partners and children had the additional stress of juggling their roles as parents, spouses and financial providers with their role as students.

“I’m a new mom so I have a 5 month old baby and by the time I get her to bed, it’s already midnight so having to get up at 6 in the morning, drop her off at daycare and go back, and pick her up and go home, and try to find time to do my homework on top of trying to find time to myself, it’s hard.”

Transitions in roles. Numerous students discussed the strain of the various transitions they are making. They are expected to adapt to numerous changes in their lives while maintaining their academic obligations. Three significant types of transitions were identified: geographic transitions, life-stage transitions, and transitions in the process of completing the social work program.

Geographic transitions seemed to coincide with the overall transition from family life to campus life. These transitions were most noted by students who had come from very different localities to reside on campus.

Transitions in life stage were another source of stress for students. Some traditional students spoke about the adjustments of leaving home and functioning independently:

“You’re moving out of your parents’ home, and you’re not just going away to camp...It feels like an ending of childhood...Then coming away from that and being totally independent... It’s stressful when you really think about my mom’s never gonna say ‘you

need to be home by midnight' or 'do this' or whatever...It's a big transition and that part is really hard coming from being a kid and coming into so much responsibility and taking care of yourself... childhood is done and that's sad."

Non-traditional students also discussed the process of returning to college and the necessary adjustments. Two women in the 35-45 age group stated that:

"...just being older, just having to relearn how to learn, just being outside the classroom, you forget how to do that. And just being able to set my time up so that I'm keeping up with everything. . ."

Major life transitions were also mentioned as a source of stress. Students who were getting married, having babies, or experiencing divorce noted higher levels of stress due to these life events.

A variation of the life-stage transition was students preparing to leave their undergraduate college world. This was particularly apparent in senior students who were participating in internships and beginning to anticipate jobs and graduate school.

Time Management. A frequently discussed source of stress for students was how to manage their time. This is confirmed in the literature which indicates that one student's perceived lack of control over time was a significant source of stress (Nonis, et. al, 1998). One student commented:

"Being a student is pretty stressful. It's impossible to do everything on time. I wish I had a million hours a day just to learn everything."

When students were given opportunities to identify their current feelings during the first few minutes of a social work skills class, the majority of students routinely related that they were "stressed," "overwhelmed," "frazzled," or "rushed" because they felt they did not have enough time to do all that they needed to do. A common theme in the battle to manage time was the tendency to procrastinate.

“I know ...I turn a lot of stuff in late, just because of falling behind. I procrastinate...Getting started is difficult and also being able to stay on task for long enough to finish the assignment is difficult.”

Procrastination tended to be a downward spiral, as already stressed students who used it as a means of avoiding unpleasant activities discovered they were doubly stressed when assignments were late.

Expectations. Expectations played a large role in the amount of stress experienced by students. This included students’ expectations of the demands that would be placed on them as students, their own expectations of themselves, and pressure to live up to the expectations of family and friends.

Many students indicated that the amount of work and the level of stress were much greater than they had anticipated. When asked how reality matched their expectation of what their senior year would be like, one traditional female student exclaimed, “I didn’t expect **this!** I mean this is so much work, I didn’t expect this much work!” Another twenty-two year old stated, “I came to college thinking it would be easy. I got caught off guard. It’s a lot more stress than I thought.”

Students often related that their own expectations of themselves created more stress for them than others’ expectations. Many of these expectations revolved around the quest for “A”s. One coed stated, “Well, you know...I don’t think it’s people. I believe it’s myself. I have high expectations of myself, and if I don’t meet those certain goals, I get stressed out.”

Perception of Social Work Major as More Stressful. One of the interesting themes that emerged was that students seemed to identify social work as a profession and the coursework in this field of social work to be a unique stressor. Many students noted that they feel more stressed

by their social work courses than by courses outside their major, partly because they believe the coursework to be more demanding and partly because of the pressure they feel to “get it.”

“I continually have to look back and read. I don’t want to be a social worker and not know what I’m doing...I can’t cram on this. It’s not just memorizing the material. You have to think critically.”

Impact of Stress on Academic Performance, Health, and Well-being

The majority of students indicated that high stress levels had a deleterious effect on their academic performance, their health, and their sense of wellbeing.

Academic Performances. In most cases, students noted that stress had a negative impact on their academic performance. Many of these students reported that they were too overwhelmed by stress to do well academically.

“I kept forgetting that a paper was due the next day; there were just so many things going on. I have to keep making to-do lists while I am in class to see what I have to do this week, but then I lose my to-do list...Then try and study like 5 minutes before the test and fail...I just feel like I’m getting C’s in everything I do, and that is not how I want to be...I want to be excellent.”

Health. Students spoke of numerous health-related issues that were a result of their high stress levels. Physical health was impacted in some cases. “I have yet to rehab my broken foot because I just haven’t had time to sit there and exercise.”

Lack of sleep was consistently both a source and a result of stress for a majority of the students. Several students estimated that they needed at least six hours of sleep per night, but they acknowledged that they frequently got only 4-5 hours per night, and on occasion only one to two hours. One student spoke of being on “virtual melt down of sleep” because she could never “sleep in”. She felt that if she slept more, she would feel more rushed and crunched for time.

Sense of Well-being. Numerous female students reported that their stress levels had resulted in depression, and that crying jags as a result of being totally overwhelmed were not

uncommon. When asked, “How does all this stress affect your sense of well-being?” One student replied,

“I cry. I find that I just cry a lot!

Interviewer: Just to relieve all the stress?

Student: Umhmm. I cry, cry, cry. Like on Saturday I think I cried most of the day. It helps. And then I’m ready to start over again. It sort of cleanses me.”

Another student stated:

“I find that the physical strain of just working so hard makes me more emotional, like I would even say unstable, but don’t quote me. (Laughter) I can’t handle things as well. Like in HBSE I had a presentation, and because I had only gotten three hours of sleep, I couldn’t even read the words, so I couldn’t do very well. You’re mentally, you’re more emotional. I can cry at the drop of a hat. And I drop the hat a lot. (Laughter) You can’t take so much more.”

Several students noted that they felt “overwhelmed” by their studies and roles in life, and shared that they don’t have time to attend to their mental health. These students described feeling “overwhelmed,” “worried,” “guilty,” and “sad.”

Coping

As students were impacted by varying stressors, they made choices about how to manage their lives. In some cases, they discovered positive coping strategies, but often, they coped in ways that created more stress for them.

Students admitted that many of the strategies they used to cope with stress were counterproductive. The most commonly cited negative coping strategy was procrastination, which frequently involved TV watching or socializing. Of interest is the fact that students did not mention using alcohol as coping strategy. Since this is clearly a strategy used by students across college campuses, it can only be surmised that the fact that researchers were also in the role of faculty members suppressed information regarding those practices.

Unfortunately, though many students could list ways to deal with their stress, they acknowledged that they were not using these strategies. One student quickly listed potential stress management techniques, but equally as quickly, she explained that she was not utilizing any of these.

“I love to paint, but I don’t get to do that.
I love to write, but I don’t do that because I’m sick of writing.
I would like to exercise, but I don’t have time.
I want to take naps. When I take naps, I feel great because I slept. But this doesn’t happen often.”

Many students described positive coping strategies such as developing better time management approaches, as well as being involved with their peers, family and religious community. Students reported feeling supported when they were able to “vent” to peers or family about their stress. Many noted that crying, sleeping, and giving themselves permission to have a “bad day” were positive coping strategies that alleviated much of the stress they felt

Others indicated that they expected family and friends to understand their choices and had to focus on having a “good attitude” and “taking one day at a time.” We found at least one student who reported having multiple roles and high academic workload, but less stress than most of the other students interviewed. She described her coping strategies, including making many choices about reducing outside responsibilities, getting good sleep, talking to family, and the following:

“I have good friends that I have grown up with. It helps to vent to someone else. Going off by myself helps...I like to go running. Having time with God and working with the church drama team helps...I have learned to manage my time. Ever since I was young, I have been involved in a lot of things. I have had to teach myself to take care of myself...Honestly, I don’t feel stressed that much. I run on the mentality that tomorrow it will be done. I generally don’t feel overwhelmed.”

Spirituality. The authors did not attempt to define spirituality, but rather allowed the students’ own definitions of spirituality to surface. A strong sense of connection to God and to

a religious community emerged frequently as a coping strategy, confirming previous studies linking spirituality to stress management. Strong spiritual beliefs and practices were often mentioned by students as a support to help them manage their stress. Students used a variety of spiritual practices ranging from spending time alone to listening to spiritual teachings and music, to worshipping with a community of faith.

“I go to church about 5:30 every morning. Monday through Friday, to pray. That helps. If I don’t go, I don’t feel as good...My relationship with God, praying and finding connections at church helps me to feel connected.”

“Being alone with God helps. Stress builds up when I don’t spend time with Him. When I spend time with Him, I get His perspective on things, and it’s like ‘okay, I can relax now.’”

“When I just get to the point that I can’t do any more, I’ll just put in a chapel tape and I’ll have a revival in the middle of the night. That’s the only thing that will help me hold together.”

One student at the Christian liberal arts university, who indicated that she was making adjustments to attending school at a primarily white institution, reported that the fact that she and her fellow students were “all Christians” eased her sense of difference. Although she missed the diversity she had previously enjoyed while living in a large metropolitan area, she said,

“I don’t really feel isolated because we’re all Christians.”

Rituals of Connection. Students interviewed indicated that stress affected them within the classroom by impacting their ability to concentrate, by creating irritableness, anxiety, and a tendency to “react” to others’ stress, withdrawing, and ultimately failing to attend. One student said, “When I get anxious it affects the way I focus. I can’t concentrate, especially during class. It’s hard for me to sit there and relax and take in what the teacher is saying, and it’s taking me longer to do certain assignments.” Rituals of connection emerged as a factor that mediated stress in the short run so that students were able to turn their attention toward learning and engaging in

the classroom. Two classroom rituals emerged as important to this outcome. One was linked to spirituality in the sense of connection to God; the other was linked to spirituality in the sense of connection to others. The first ritual which we will call “pray and share” encouraged students to voice prayer requests prior to beginning the work of the day. The entire ritual took no more than three to seven minutes. Students were then supported as the instructor or other students prayed for them, at times with the additional ritual of holding hands or “laying on of hands.” Students often requested prayer for loved ones who were having problems at home, an often-mentioned source of stress. Students also frequently requested prayer for decisions they needed to make, tests for which they were studying, or for a general sense of being overwhelmed.

Students came to expect this time of prayer and often reported that it had a real impact on their attitudes and ability to focus. During the Fall of 2005, students in one class where prayer was used as an opening ritual moved as a group to the other author’s class where a similar opening ritual was used. Students often reported that they felt less anxiety having prayed in the first class and no longer felt a need to raise the same requests in the second class. At other times, if the first class had not prayed together, students expressed a sense of urgency to have an opportunity to do so in the second class. This ritual created a “community of caring” as students supported each other and realized that they were not alone in their stresses. In addition, students perceived the instructor as being more caring and concerned about the students’ learning. One instructor saw a significant increase in student ratings on this item after beginning this as a regular ritual in her classroom.

The second ritual, “the feelings check,” was developed in an effort to create increased skill in identifying and empathizing with others’ feelings as part of an interpersonal skills class. Several variations of the feeling check were included each time the class met, including

identifying feelings in one word, to identifying feelings and the source of feelings, to identifying feelings and the beliefs behind those feelings. At other times, students broke up into dyads and spent five minutes empathizing with their fellow students. With a few exceptions, students looked forward to this exercise, expressing disappointment if we did not engage in it. Students often commented that they had been looking forward to it all day, planning what they would say. Comments from students about the reason they found the exercise beneficial included:

“It helps to know that you are not alone. I came in here thinking I was the only one overwhelmed, and now I realize that I’m not.”

“I love talking about feelings. I can always talk about that.”

“Sometimes you wonder what’s wrong with me, how come I’m having such a hard time, then you hear how everybody else is doing and you don’t feel so bad.”

Over the course of the semester, the instructor noted that students were increasingly frank with the kinds of concerns they were willing to share and that the amount of discussion, participation, and risk-taking increased. The fact that everyone had to participate on some level meant that everyone in the classroom, from the quietest to the most verbose, had an equal opportunity to have a voice and to be heard. Compared with other classes in which this is not done, students then participated more throughout the rest of the class.

Although that ritual is only used routinely in one skills class based on the course objectives, students often ask for it in later courses, indicating that they enjoy it and wish to have it repeated. According to Imber-Black, Robert & Whiting (1988) this is one of the primary characteristics of a ritual as opposed to a routine. Those involved value the experience and wish to see it repeated.

Discussion

Intentionally observing student stress created awareness among the authors of the far-reaching impact that stress has on student lives. The role of faculty as mentors and advisors makes it essential that those charged with teaching make every effort to attend to those factors that may impede student success. Previous studies have indicated that the adequacy of support can make a difference between students persisting in their studies and dropping out (Merdinger, 1991).

According to Home (1998), “Developing appropriate responses requires knowledge of which students are more vulnerable to role strain and which kinds of support ease it” (p.85). Use of intentional ongoing peer support could have a mediating effect on the stress level of students. In the group interview with senior social work students, it was evident that all in the group were experiencing high levels of stress, some bordering on dangerous levels. However, even a one-hour interview process of asking questions about their stress seemed to relieve tension in the room. The students relaxed, laughed together and enjoyed finding out things about one another that were previously unknown, even though they had spent more than a year together in numerous other classes. Creating rituals of connection in the classroom may help to foster a learning environment conducive to communication, mutual support, and risk-taking. Connectedness with the self, with others, and with the numinous has been shown to have a positive impact on stress (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998). In addition, the expression of emotion has been linked to positive effects on one’s well being (Finekenauer & Rime, 1998; Pennebaker, & Graybeal, 2001).

Although spirituality has traditionally been outside the realm of most secular learning environments, it may be very appropriate to encourage students to utilize spiritual tools that are in accordance with their own faith practices. According to one study of social work students,

91.1% indicated that they had a belief in a notion of God, a transcendent force, or a divine dimension, and 90% identified themselves as having some current faith affiliation (Sheridan, & Hemart, 1999). In spite of the fact that many of the social work students did not attend a religious service on a weekly basis, 57.5% said that they participated in a personal religious or spiritual practices such as meditation, reading scriptures/ scriptural text, or prayer on a daily or weekly basis. According to Fabricatore, Handal, and Fenzel (2000), “Young adults who experience more connection and direction from God in their daily lives, and who use that relationship to deal with life’s difficulties, give a more positive appraisal of their lives as a whole than do people who are less spiritually involved” (p. 225).

Creating avenues for connections with God, with self, and with others appears to be an important strategy for reducing the overall impact of student stress. Although a “feelings check” may not be appropriate for every classroom setting, finding ways for students to express themselves and find validation for the stress and difficulties they share, may significantly impact learning, health, and overall well being.

Limitations of the current research include the fact that the large majority of students interviewed were women. Research suggests that self-expression may be more beneficial for women than men and that it may be related to relational styles. Ambivalence about self-expression may create more stress. A further limitation of the population may be the fact that spiritual themes appeared more frequently, although not exclusively, in the narratives of students from the Christian university. In addition, students were interviewed by faculty members, and the full range of their experience with stress, both its impact and their coping mechanisms, may have been suppressed. It is well known that a common feature of student culture across college campuses involves using alcohol and drugs to reduce stress and, furthermore, that “out of

control” drinking may lead to further stress as the student finds that she/he is less able to deal with day to day responsibilities. Alcohol was mentioned only once in the student interviews, and the context indicated that the student, given his responsibility to clients ,did not feel as free to imbibe as students in other majors might feel.

Although there is no doubt that important aspects of student stress were captured in the richness of students’ accounts, future research should ensure that the students feel safe in discussing all aspects of their lives. This would necessitate that interviews do not involve the researchers’ own students.

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