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College students today experience high levels of stress in many areas of life. This is an important realm for further research and a potent avenue of intervention for college mental health professionals.

Stress Among Students

Christine Dunkel-Schetter, Marci Lobel

My most remembered stressful experience deals with my first year here . . . finals week of my first quarter. I had never encountered such heavy stress for that long a period in my life. Not only was this finals week stressful to me, it was stressful to the whole dorm I lived in. The majority of the people in the dorm were living, breathing stress machines.

—Personal Communication

Stress is ubiquitous, not only in American society but around the world (Antonovsky, 1979). To most of us, this is not news. What is sometimes surprising, however, is that college students in the United States today experience high levels of stress: "College age youth are thought by the general public to be engaged in a perpetual round of adventure and merriment and to be somehow immune from mundane cares and concerns of establishing an identity and dealing with the unexpected" (LaGrand, 1985, p. 15). In fact, the college years are quite stressful, and the effects of stress are further cause for concern. Stress has various negative consequences for physical health (Cebelin and Hirsch, 1980; DeLongis and others, 1982; Jemmott and Locke, 1984) and mental health (Grant, Sweetwood, Yager, and Gerst, 1978; Kanner, Coyne, Schaeffer, and Lazarus, 1981; Surtees and Ingham, 1980). For college students in particular, stress may be a contributor to the high incidence in this population of depression and suicide, substance abuse, such eating disorders as bulimia and anorexia nervosa, and poor academic performance and attrition from college. This chapter addresses stress in college students by bringing together past research with research we have conducted at UCLA. The

goals of the chapter are to highlight the nature and extent of students' stressful experiences and to delineate some of the major conceptual and methodological issues involved in studying this topic.

Past Research on Stress Among College Students

Stress-Related Research with Students. Several bodies of research are relevant to the topic of stress in students, but most studies have not focused on the actual stressful experiences of the full spectrum of students. Past research has often concentrated on various behavioral problems that are causes for seeking help from campus mental health centers. Clusters of studies have investigated depression (Sherer, 1985), psychiatric disturbance (Reifler, 1971; Thompson, Bentz, and Liptzin, 1973), eating disorders (Pyle, Halvorson, Neuman, and Mitchell, 1986), drug abuse (Stokes, 1974), alcoholism (Brennan, Walfish, and AuBuchon, 1986), and suicide (Bernard and Bernard, 1985) on campus. Research of this sort is usually on the incidence of diagnosable disorders and on treatment. The causes of these disorders among students may lie outside the institution, yet there is reason to believe that high levels of stress among students may contribute to the high prevalence of these problems on campus.

A smaller body of related research links stressful life events with poor physical and mental health (Kessler, Price, and Wortman, 1985). As in the research on adults, major negative life events, such as the death of a loved one, have been associated with various symptoms or illnesses in students, including high blood pressure (Myers, Bastien, and Miles, 1983) and affective disorders (Ionescu and Popescu, 1986). Stronger links are typically found when social support or other resources are not available to buffer the effects of these stressful life events (Cohen and Hoberman, 1983).

Another focus of past research is on adjustment to college in entering students (for example, Compas, Wagner, Slavin, and Vannatta, 1986; Cutrona, 1982). The first year of college is often a difficult one: students leave support systems and form new friendships; there are high and often unclear academic demands and a large number of new distractions (Leconte, 1986). A related portion of past research examines concerns, stress, and adjustment in particular subgroups—for example, ethnic minority students (Gunnings, 1982; Edmunds, 1984; Fleming, 1981; Pliner and Brown, 1985). Research on entering college students and on particular subgroups of students can pinpoint high-risk groups, but it may overlook a high incidence of stress in the remaining portion of the student body.

Prevalence of Stress and Distress on Campus. In the 1970s, a cluster of studies appeared on the high prevalence of emotional distress among college students in general. For example, Comstock and Slome (1973) surveyed a random sample of 1,260 university students in North Carolina

and found that 30 percent had moderate to severe emotional problems. Similarly, a standard psychiatric assessment showed high levels of distress among a random sample of 1,502 students in a large public university in the Midwest (Mechanic and Greenley, 1976). Moos and Van Dort (1977) reported that 25 to 75 percent of nearly 1,300 freshmen from two contrasting university campuses complained of emotional symptoms at some time during their first year. Finally, Christenfeld and Black (1977), using the Spielberger State Anxiety Inventory, found strikingly high mood disturbance (anxiety and depression) in 214 undergraduates at a small, liberal arts college.

Apparently, stress in college students has increased in the 1980s (Astin and others, 1988; Koplik and DeVito, 1986). In 1983, *Newsweek on Campus* reported that 59 percent of over 500 students in the magazine's national poll suffered stress, burnout, depression, or anxiety during college ("The Stress Syndrome . . .," 1983). Four years later ("The Perils of Burnout," 1987), the magazine reported that "stress is running even higher than usual at colleges this fall." A survey of undergraduate males at a midwestern university found 93 percent had experienced physical signs of stress, such as headaches, and 88 percent had experienced stress-related feelings, such as depression (Pinch, Heck, and Vinal, 1986).

In summary, although the number of studies examining stress among college students is not large, the available research indicates that a student's college or university life today does not reflect the classic image of a blissful late adolescence within the ivory tower, where the strains of the real world are nonexistent. Instead, the picture is one of a troubled and difficult time, the sources of which are only somewhat understood.

Sources of Stress on Campus. A few studies have addressed different sources of stress for students, although this is rarely the main focus of the research. For example, more than 7,000 undergraduates randomly sampled from thirty-four New England colleges and universities completed a mail questionnaire that included questions about twenty-one common concerns and feelings of college students (Wechsler, Rohman, and Solomon, 1981). Nearly one-third of the students reported at least one anxiety-related concern; 23 percent reported difficulties with interpersonal relationships, 20 percent reported motivational problems associated with depression, and 14 percent reported that being depressed had been a major problem for them in the past year.

In another study, 265 students completed questionnaires at a medium-size university in Virginia (Beard, Elmore, and Lange, 1982). Twenty types of potential stress were covered within three areas: personal-social, vocational, and academic. The most common stressful areas for students were academic concerns, sexuality, and interpersonal relationships.

In a third investigation, Zitzow (1984) developed an instrument to

assess student life events and their intensity with 1,146 students from four colleges in different regions of the country. Academic, social, personal, and family-home events were included in questionnaires. The six top-rated sources of stress were all of an academic nature, including self-induced pressure to get good grades (96 percent) and studying for tests (96 percent). Other frequent sources of stress included concern over problems of friends (84 percent), depression (82 percent), lack of self-confidence (78 percent), difficulty in budgeting money (82 percent), and anxiety or tension (79 percent).

Pinch, Heck, and Vinal (1986) also addressed these issues in a study of 313 male freshmen who were dorm residents in a midwestern university. The students completed a long questionnaire on health issues that included information on stress. School workload (88 percent) and finances (59 percent) were identified as major contributors to stress.

Finally, LaGrand (1985) asked over 3,000 students to indicate their most recent major loss: 28 percent had recently experienced the death of a loved one, and 25 percent had experienced the breakup of a love relationship. LaGrand concludes that grieving is extremely common among college students, although it often goes unnoticed and untreated.

To summarize, the primary sources of stress identified in past studies appear to be academic demands, interpersonal issues, financial concerns, and sexuality. In addition, it appears that emotional distress stemming from any cause is itself a source of stress.

UCLA Stress Surveys

In a series of surveys over three years, we attempted to explore the dimensions and extent of stress felt by undergraduates at our institution, UCLA. Surveys were conducted in 1983, 1984, and 1985 as part of an undergraduate course in survey research methods that contained approximately ten senior psychology majors. Each year, 150 to 180 male and female students were interviewed by the class. The characteristics of these three samples appear in Table 1.

The content of the surveys varied somewhat over the three years, as a function of the particular research interests of the students conducting the study. In 1983, the survey was on general stress. In 1984, it focused on health habits. The 1985 survey dealt with coping strategies used to manage stress. The descriptive profile of stress reported here was only one of several goals of the class surveys.

Characteristics of the University. UCLA is a large public university in an urban setting. It enrolls over 20,000 undergraduates per year. The student body is extremely diverse in terms of social class, ethnicity, and age; most students (92 percent) are from California. Approximately 24 percent live at home and commute, 53 percent live in off-campus hous-

Table 1. Sample and Population Characteristics

	1983	1984	1985	UCLA
Sample size	161	187	150	
Male	45%	50%	33%	49%
Female	55%	50%	67%	51%
White	65%	63%	60%	61%
Asian		20%	22%	22%
Hispanic	35%	6%	10%	9%
Black		5%	5%	6%
Other		6%	4%	2%
Freshman	24%	24%	14%	28%
Sophomore	20%	23%	15%	21%
Junior	34%	31%	25%	29%
Senior	21%	22%	45%	14%
Average age	21	21	22	21
Age range	17-66	17-48	16-46	—
Employed	71%	54%	60%	—
Average hrs/wk	18	16	—	—
Range hrs/wk	2-55	3-60	—	—
From California	82%	—	—	—
From Los Angeles	62%	—	—	92%*
Average GPA	3.1	—	—	3.78*

*Figures for fall 1988

ing, and 23 percent live on campus in residence halls, fraternities, or sororities.

Sampling. For our surveys, a random sample of all currently enrolled undergraduates was requested each year from the university registrar during the fall quarter. Students' names, addresses, telephone numbers, and years in school were provided to the instructor. Interviewers were given only the telephone numbers and first names of students.

Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing. The surveys were conducted by telephone, with a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) system (Shure and Meeker, 1978). In this system, the interview is conducted at a computer terminal, where the interviewer's questions appear on the monitor, and respondents' answers are entered immediately via the keyboard. The data are then automatically coded and can easily be compiled to obtain rapid results when the survey has been completed.

Procedures and Response Rates. Interviews were conducted in the evenings and on weekends because students had classes or other commitments on weekdays. Data collection was halted after two weeks, to allow students in the class to conduct data analyses and write research reports within the limits of the ten-week quarter. Approximately 50 percent of

the sampled students were contacted each year, and these students agreed to be interviewed (40 percent of the students sampled were either not home when called or no longer reachable by phone, and refusal rates averaged about 10 percent).

Ideally, a telephone survey such as this one would obtain a 65 percent or better response rate, but our refusal rate was still lower than usual (Fowler, 1984). Moreover, comparison of the sampled students' characteristics to those of the entire student body indicates that our samples were quite similar in composition to the student body as a whole with respect to gender, race, age, and year in school. The low refusal rates also suggest that if the studies had been continued over longer periods of time, and if calls had been placed during the day, a higher response rate would probably have been obtained. The main source of bias is likely to be overrepresentation of students who are at home evenings and weekends and underrepresentation of those students who happened not to be at home when they were called.

Measures. The interview each year consisted of a specific set of questions, developed and pretested by the class, that took approximately ten to fifteen minutes to administer. Questions were included on a variety of potentially stressful domains, such as social life, academics, family, and finances. Virtually all of the questions had structured-response alternatives involving a four- or five-point scale (*never, rarely, sometimes, often, or very often*). Whenever possible, standard questions were taken from inventories that had been previously validated, such as the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Karmarck, and Mermelstein, 1983) and the CES-D (Radloff, 1977). However, brief questions on the topics of interest were often not available and had to be devised. Some of the items on academic stress, interpersonal stress, financial stress, and perceived stress were used in more than one year.

Profile of Undergraduate Stress

General Levels of Stress. Over the three years of this set of surveys, one-third to one-half of the samples said they often or very often experienced stress as students. In our first survey, 30 to 60 percent (depending on the way the question was worded) reported having shown signs of depression during the preceding month. In the second survey, 15 percent reported that they had been depressed often or fairly often in the preceding month; 8 percent also said they "couldn't shake the blues" during that time. Two-thirds reported current problems with eating and sleeping or with illness.

Academic Stress. High levels of academic stress were reported by between one- and two-thirds of the samples over the three years. In 1983, 65 percent of the students said competition was stressful for them, and 83

percent said they felt that how well they did academically was "uncontrollable." Further, 71 percent said they were anxious about tests, and 78 percent felt time pressure. As might be expected, students who felt the most academic stress were also those who reported a greater need to achieve in college. Two years later, we tried to narrow the questions down, in order to identify the number of students who were under extreme academic pressure. We found 31 percent who reported that they were "usually overwhelmed by course work," and 20 percent said that grade-point average was a "constant worry" for them.

Stress in Family Relationships. The family appeared to be a major source of stress for many students. More than one-third of the students sampled in each of the first two years felt burdened by family responsibilities, had trouble relating to their parents, and said their families were currently having difficulties. In the first survey, 75 percent of the students reported having conflicts with their parents two times a week or more, and 85 percent said they did not get along with their parents.

Although the family was clearly a source of stress for many students, it was also a source of social support. For example, in the second survey, 85 percent of the students said their families were somewhat or very supportive. This pattern fits well with past research in which the double-edged nature of social relationships has been discussed (Abbey, Abramis, and Caplan, 1985; Rook, 1984; Wortman and Dunkel-Schetter, 1987).

Stress in Social Relationships. Results from all three surveys indicate that students have considerable difficulty forming and maintaining social relationships with their peers. About one-half of the sample for the first survey had no romantic relationships. One-third said it was difficult to start romantic relationships, and 60 percent said it was difficult to keep them. In addition, 27 percent said it was difficult to make friends, and 14 percent were lonely often or very often. In the second and third surveys, similar or larger numbers of students said it was difficult to make friends (27 percent, 65 percent) and to form romantic relationships (48 percent, 55 percent). We also found in 1983 that 44 percent did not socialize frequently with fellow students; half of this group rarely or never did. More than 50 percent of the sample did not belong to any social groups on campus, 11 percent had no friends on campus, and another 6 percent reported having only one friend.

Despite this picture, there is again evidence of the two-sided nature of relationships. In 1983, 90 percent of the sample reported receiving each of five different types of support from someone (love/caring, understanding, someone to listen, advice/information, small favor). Providers of support were usually friends; rarely were they parents or someone affiliated with the university. Low use of formal university sources of support were also evident in that only 9 percent of the sample had ever confided in a professional campus counselor and only 11 percent in a peer counselor.

Financial Stress. In the first two surveys, we asked about financial strain and found considerable evidence of its existence among students. In the first year, 57 percent felt it was a burden to pay tuition and living expenses. The next year, 40 percent said financial responsibilities were "overwhelming often or very often." In addition, we learned that two-thirds of the students interviewed were employed, and the average number of hours worked was seventeen per week (with a range of from two to sixty hours).

Consequences or Correlates of Stress in College. Simple correlational analyses indicated that some of our variables were interrelated significantly in meaningful patterns ($p < .05$). Feeling academically stressed as a student was associated with feeling significantly less good about oneself and about one's life. Experiencing family stress or financial stress was associated significantly with being depressed and feeling more overwhelmed by stress in one's life in general. Participating in activities with other students was inversely related to depression and positively associated with feeling healthy and physically fit (see Reifman and Dunkel-Schetter, in press, for details). Furthermore, belonging to social groups, having more friends on campus and socializing with students were all associated with significantly greater satisfaction in college. In turn, lower satisfaction with the campus was associated with having attended a high school that was dissimilar to the university.

Effects of Gender, Ethnicity, and Year in College. Women reported significantly higher levels of stress than men in two out of the three surveys we are discussing here. Women also sought and received more support. In general, female students reported coping with stressful situations in different ways than male students reported. Women were more likely than men to say they appraised a situation as controllable, sought support, confronted a problem, and solved a problem. Men, in contrast, were more likely to say they used less active forms of coping with stress, such as self-control and positive reappraisal.

No stable differences emerged among ethnic groups in analyses of the variables studied, although the number of black and Hispanic students in the samples was not sufficiently large for statistically powerful tests. There were also no clear patterns of difference among freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, possibly because of the great age diversity of students on this campus.

Implications and Conclusions

Two conclusions, and several inferences, can be drawn from our review of the literature and our research on stress in college students. First, it is quite clear that college students are not immune to stress, nor are they necessarily protected from the sorts of stress that occur in the general population. Stu-

dents experience what appear to be high levels of stress in several domains of life, which simultaneously include their friendships and romantic relationships, family relationships, financial affairs, and academic work. In fact, because many students have not experienced such high levels of stress before, they may lack insight or skills for coping with it.

Many students in our surveys worked full-time while also taking a full-time course load. Because of the rising cost of college, together with declines in federal aid, students are carrying more of the financial burden themselves through jobs and loans, and they are relying on their parents more (Astin and others, 1988; "The Perils of Burnout," 1987). If families provide substantial support, students may worry about the burden their families bear. Academic pressure can be exacerbated when the financial and personal costs of an education are so high. Students are likely to feel that it is essential to excel in order to justify the major sacrifices they are making.

The general public, as well as academic personnel at all levels, must therefore recognize that college students are psychologically vulnerable. Furthermore, institutions of higher learning may need to be especially responsive to this fact. It may be harder to learn under circumstances of high stress than under lower levels of stress. Extremely high levels of stress can impair concentration and problem solving, as well as disrupt emotional stability (Gatchel, Baum, and Kranz, 1989). Overburdened schedules lead students to gear studying to test performance, rather than to retention over time. Stress can also make it difficult to manage time effectively and meet course-work deadlines.

The second conclusion we can draw is that these issues merit much more systematic investigation. Sufficient preliminary research exists to highlight the potential importance of stress on campus, yet without methodologically sophisticated and up-to-date research the issues cannot be fully comprehended or responded to by colleges and universities. Carefully designed, national studies must be the next step in determining the full extent and nature of stress for college students.

Methodological Considerations in Student Stress Research. Several features of the way our surveys were conducted merit emphasis. First, CATT is an excellent resource for college officials who wish to examine these or other issues in a rigorous, inexpensive, and expedient fashion. Telephone interviews are practical because they are not as expensive or time-consuming as face-to-face interviews, yet they are much easier for student respondents than completing a questionnaire, and they have higher response rates than mail questionnaires (Frey, 1983).

Second, the use of student interviewers is valuable for increasing the quality of the data, at least on larger campuses, where interviews can be conducted without violating students' privacy. We found that students were uniquely well qualified to conduct interviews because of their status

nomenon is. To stress researchers, stress is not synonymous with depression and anxiety, although the term is often used in this way by those outside the field.

Historically, stress has been conceptualized as either a stimulus (an event occurring in the external environment) or as a response (an emotional or physiological reaction (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Hobfoll, 1989). Most current definitions are more complex than this, however, incorporating environmental events, perceptions of them by the individual, and a variety of possible levels of response (Hobfoll, 1989).

The most widely accepted conceptualization of stress at present is probably that of Lazarus and his colleagues (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus and Launier, 1978; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). This work has served as the basis for defining variables and examining their interrelationships in our research on student stress. *Psychological stress* is defined as a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). This definition has several key components. First, stress involves transactions between the person and the environment that are rapidly changing. Second, the emphasis is on how a person perceives a situation (that is, as threatening or challenging), rather than on objective aspects of the situation. Third, a situation is perceived as stressful when the ability to manage it exceeds ordinary adaptive capabilities.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) also distinguish among the antecedents of stress, the mediating stress and coping process, and the consequences of stress for adaptation. The term *antecedents* refers to aspects of oneself or the environment that make one vulnerable or resistant to stress, such as one's values, commitments, and beliefs and one's social network, genetic predisposition, or material resources. The *stress process* includes cognitive appraisal (or how one perceives a stressful situation) and coping responses, which are cognitive and behavioral strategies to manage stress. *Stress consequences* include physiological changes, emotions, morale, and social functioning, which may be grouped according to immediate or longer-term effects.

This framework for conceptualizing stress has good applicability to college student populations because students are experiencing stress partly as a function of the campus environment and partly as a function of their own inexperience, lack of skills, or other personal vulnerabilities. By emphasizing both the environmental component of stress and the person's contribution, this definition explains why almost all students have trouble adjusting during the first-year of college, why some students have more trouble than others, and why a few do not ever successfully adjust to college. Research that considers environmental factors that in-

as peers, which seemed to decrease rates of refusal over the rates usually achieved in telephone surveys and contributed to good rapport and honesty during interviews.

A third feature was the use of the registrar's computerized student records to obtain a random sample of students. The importance of a representative sample in student surveys is paramount because the goal is to obtain an accurate picture of the experiences of the student body as a whole. Sampling in any nonrandom manner will potentially bias results and undermine their value. It is also possible through computerized records to sample for equal numbers of specific groups, such as equal numbers of men and women, equal numbers of students across classes, or equal numbers of students from various ethnic groups, in order to permit comparisons of subgroups.

The development of standard measures of student stress that can be used across campuses is also highly desirable. This would permit comparison of different campus environments, as well as comparisons from year to year. Standard measures have rarely been used in past research on stress with college students, partly because they are usually long and cannot be included in brief surveys. Researchers may need to devote considerable time to pilot-testing, in order to develop a brief but reliable and valid set of survey questions before adopting a standard set, but the benefits of this process are clear.

It is notable that each of our surveys was cross-sectional, involving the collection of data at only one point in time, a procedure that does not permit inferences about causes and effects. For example, we found that academically stressed students felt less good about themselves and their lives, but we cannot tell whether this means that academic stress causes decrements in self-esteem and life satisfaction or whether it means that students low in self-esteem and life satisfaction tend to experience more academic stress. The only way to untangle these possibilities is to collect data from a particular sample of students over time. Longitudinal or panel survey designs—beginning, ideally, with precollege baseline data—will yield the most accurate and complete information about causes and consequences of stress in students. This type of research is very much needed.

Conceptualizations of Stress and Their Applicability to Students. Past research on stress in college students is generally atheoretical and uninformed by the vast body of theory and research on life stress, yet the use of theoretical definitions and frameworks can aid in formulating the problems to study among college students, the methods of study, and the framing of conclusions. For example, past research with college students has not generally used explicit definitions of the term *stress*. Unless the term is defined, there may be disagreement about what the basic phe-

crease the prevalence of student stress, as well as dispositional factors that increase students' vulnerability to stressful college environments, could be especially valuable (Tracey, Sherry, and Keitel, 1986).

Acute and Chronic Forms of Stress. One simple and potentially useful distinction between different forms of stress is the distinction between acute and chronic stress. *Acute stress* refers to the experience of discrete events of limited duration, varying in intensity from slight (for example, daily irritants or "hassles," such as a flat tire or long course-registration lines) to fairly strong (for example, major life events, such as personal injury or the sudden death of a close relative). Jacobson's (1974, 1979) reviews of crisis theory suggest that what is often called a *crisis* in psychiatry and community or counseling psychology is similar to what we refer to here as *strong acute stress*; *crisis* is defined as an acute stage lasting no longer than four to six weeks, with a specific date of onset (Jacobson, 1974, 1979). *Chronic stress*, by contrast, is of longer duration and often involves a gradual onset. Its causes include widespread conditions (for example, economic recession, war), as well as individualized chronic conditions (for example, financial difficulties, job strain, caring for an infant).

Both acute and chronic stress are experienced by undergraduate students in university and college settings. For a number of years, we asked undergraduates in a health psychology class at our university to describe the most stressful situations they had experienced in the preceding month. In a class of thirty undergraduates, no one had difficulty describing a stressful experience, and very few of these were of a minor nature. In all, about half reported an acute stressor during the preceding month, and half reported some form of chronic stress. Acute stressors included hospitalization for substance abuse, sexual assault, death of a parent by suicide, a serious knee injury, sudden marital and relationship breakups, car accidents, and loss of a job. Among the chronic stressors were relationship tension with parents or partners, physical separation from loved ones, work pressure, time pressure, academic pressure, difficult adjustments after moving, and difficult career or personal decisions.

Because of the treatment implications of these two different forms of stress, it may be useful in future research to distinguish them and to examine their prevalence. College mental health services must often focus on acute stress because it precipitates help-seeking behavior. However, the chronic stress experienced by students today is also worthy of attention. Most of the stress-related questions in our surveys concerned chronic stress, and we found notably high levels of chronic stress in the family, peer, academic, and financial domains of students' lives. Chronic stress is actually the context within which acute stressors occur. If a student's personal resources (such as health and energy, finances, coping skills, or interpersonal relationships) are already taxed by chronic stress, then the

occurrence of an acute event, even one of small magnitude, may have the potential to trigger a crisis.

Policy Implications. The themes developed in this chapter have many policy implications. These can be divided into three types: methods for increasing awareness of student stress, prevention programs, and intervention methods directed toward students experiencing stress. Few of the following suggestions for policymakers are novel; many institutions now have them in place.

Where methods to increase awareness are concerned, there should be multiple benefits for students, parents, faculty, and administrators. The recognition that stress is prevalent in college can help students to have more realistic expectations for their own experience and less likelihood of feeling inadequate or abnormal if they become overwhelmed by extreme demands at any point. For parents, faculty, and administrators, awareness may lead to increased supportiveness and sensitivity. Among faculty members, greater awareness of the high levels of personal stress that students often shoulder could be helpful in planning course work that is realistically geared to students' abilities. Awareness on the part of administrators should lead to the devoting of more resources aimed at reducing stress among students and enhancing their opportunities for learning under conditions of stress.

There are a number of ways to increase awareness of the prevalence and sources of stress on campus. Factual brochures can be developed for students and parents and distributed at the time of enrollment. Workshops, panels, or lectures concerning stress in college could be incorporated into new-student orientation and developed as special campus events; many medical schools already have such programs, which could serve as models. Another possibility would be to publish a quarterly newsletter on campus health, aimed toward increasing community well-being. It could include brief summaries of recent research on college students' health, information on physical health and mental health in general, and periodic updates on campus programs for students. Besides having practical benefits, such a newsletter could function both as a regular reminder that stress is common among students and as a source of information on how stress can be managed effectively. The newsletter could also be sent to parents, faculty, and administrators. Related ideas could be to submit a series of articles on stress in college to the school newspaper, or to disseminate information through the campus radio station. Finally, videotapes can be produced about sources of stress on campus and effective ways to cope with stress. These could be checked out by students and used in student orientation or mental health programs.

With respect to primary prevention, increasing the availability and amount of financial aid would undoubtedly reduce the burden on stu-

with between eight and twelve participants who would attend weekly sessions with a facilitator. The groups could be especially effective in helping with the management of chronic stress because they would legitimize discussions of the stressors that ebb and flow over time.

A final suggestion for addressing stress among students is to develop sanctioned programs, whereby students could take a quarter or a year off if the circumstances of their lives were not conducive to learning. Many students could benefit from this time away, especially if they were helped to obtain career-related work experience and to work out the details of their time away.

Conclusion

We have argued for the evidence that many college students today are experiencing high levels of stress. This picture does not match the traditional image of college as an easy time. Compared to college students of two decades ago, students today appear to be experiencing more and different kinds of stress. There are also signs that the stress experienced by college students today is similar in amount and type to that found in the general population. Students confront substance abuse, illness, death, loneliness, and depression. Some types of stress are unusually prevalent on college campuses, such as stressors related to sexual assault, eating disorders, and suicide. Perhaps most important is the possibility that the quality of the learning experience for many students is impaired by life stress. In this chapter, we have tried to emphasize the need for further systematic investigation of these issues and to suggest ways to go about it. Programs aimed at reducing stress should improve the quality of student life and simultaneously enhance the learning opportunities afforded by attending college.

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dents who now work for pay more than twenty hours per week. Another improvement would be to structure course requirements and curriculum requirements. Course work usually requires students to meet many deadlines within a short quarter or semester. Students who have other roles besides that of student (such as parent or employee) often have difficulty meeting rigid deadlines, but they may be able to meet course requirements if courses are structured somewhat flexibly. For example, rather than administering five required quizzes, an instructor could allow students to take any five of six quizzes and miss one of their own choosing. To meet college major requirements, students could be allowed some degree of self-determination over setting deadlines for completion of specific steps, perhaps by developing financial resources and curriculum flexibility.

In addition to increasing financial resources and curriculum flexibility, colleges can help to prevent severe stress in students by teaching them about a wide range of skills, including study skills, test-taking strategies, effective time management, and specific stress-management methods, such as relaxation or exercise. Students can also be encouraged to make effective use of whatever social support is available to them, and they can be taught the importance of sharing difficult feelings and concerns with others in appropriate ways. Interpersonal skills training, as well as information about the health benefits of social relationships, could enable students to use support systems effectively as a buffer against stress. It may also be useful to increase the involvement of students with one another—in class, for example, through more small-group interaction, or outside class through the development of interactive campus activities. These sorts of steps could facilitate the development of campus friendships and enrich the learning experience. Finally, information on good health habits, including sleep, nutrition, and exercise, may increase the well-being of students, particularly if such information is geared toward the immediate benefits of stress management and enhanced well-being, as opposed to the long-term benefits.

As for interventions with students who are already experiencing stress, the availability of brief individualized psychotherapy for students in crisis, as well as of extended psychotherapy for those who need it, is essential, since crises can bring out deeper issues for students, as well as opportunities for personal growth that are often effectively developed in therapy. Housing complexes often have students serve as resident assistants, with responsibility for student welfare. These individuals can fill an important immediate role by intercepting students who are experiencing unusual amounts of stress. They should be well informed about sources of stress on campus and about the various means of assistance. It may also be useful to form voluntary groups for students, where they can discuss their stress-related concerns. Much like self-help groups, these groups could be formed at the start of each quarter or semester,

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We often do not see a student with drug and alcohol problems until he or she meets a crisis or "hits bottom."

The Problem of Substance Abuse

Vivian B. Brown

Drug and alcohol use is one of the major problems in the country and on the college campus. Studies show that college students drink more than other groups in the population, may drink more at one time, and tend to use illegal drugs (O'Malley, Bachman, and Johnston, 1988; Johnston, O'Malley, and Bachman, 1987). Results of the most recent annual College Alcohol Survey showed that 35 percent of student-affairs administrators thought campus problems involving alcohol had increased in the past several years, and 41 percent saw no change (Magner, 1988). When a similar survey was conducted in 1985, 30 percent said alcohol-related problems had increased.

The issue of crisis is an important concept for substance use, misuse, and abuse because we often do not see a student in the counseling center until he or she meets a crisis or "hits bottom." Until something has changed in the student's life, he or she will not seek counseling, particularly regarding drugs and alcohol. It is extremely important that all counseling center staff be knowledgeable about patterns of use, drugs of abuse, how to take a comprehensive drug history (how to ask the right questions), and how to work with denial.

Two major crisis situations bring a substance abuser into counseling: (1) when the drugs or alcohol get the individual in trouble with the law, school, a job, or significant others (drugs as precipitant), and (2) when some event causes the student to increase drinking or drugging, and this leads to more serious problems, such as an overdose or the need for emergency medical attention (drugs as coping). In either case, we see the student when something has gone wrong and he or she cannot keep up the denial that there is no problem. When the drinking or drugging has