

Supporting Graduate Students and Postdocs Experiencing Burnout: Strategies and Resources for Faculty



Understanding and Identifying Burnout

Burnout: prolonged, chronic workplace stress, resulting in symptoms in three dimensions:

- Emotional, mental, and/or physical exhaustion
- Feelings of cynicism and/or detachment
- Feelings of ineffectiveness/inefficiency and lack of accomplishment

Source: World Health Organization, 2020

Strategies

- ✓ Normalize discussing stress and burnout
- ✓ To the extent possible, provide flexibility in scheduling
- ✓ Provide opportunities for community and socialization, which helps protect against burnout
- ✓ Model setting healthy boundaries around work hours
- ✓ Model taking regular breaks—during the workday and throughout the semester
- ✓ Conduct a lab/research group climate survey to understand the issues members of your group are facing
- ✓ Encourage grad students and postdocs to use resources, support, and services
- ✓ Teach and model how to prioritize tasks
- ✓ Encourage and support taking time away from work
- ✓ Check in about available time and bandwidth before setting deadlines and assigning work
- ✓ Encourage grad students and postdocs to pursue the work, research, and opportunities they find most meaningful and fulfilling, which helps prevent burnout
- ✓ Recognize that students and postdocs of color, women+ students and postdocs, disabled students and postdocs, international students and postdocs, and LGBTQIA students and postdocs often face additional stresses that contribute to burnout

Services and Resources

The [Center for Assessment, Referral and Education \(CARE\)](#) provides counseling and support to graduate students.

The [Employee Assistance Program](#) provides counselling and support for postdocs, faculty, and staff.

[Health Initiatives](#) offers workshops and events to support the well-being of the Tech community.

Additional Reading

Nagoski, E. and Nagoski, A. 2020. *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle.*

Jiménez, J. 2021. *The Burnout Fix.*

Fowler, A. 2020. "[A Time for Boundaries.](#)" *Inside Higher Ed.*

O'Grady, K. 2021. "[Managing Through Emotional Exhaustion.](#)" *The Chronicle.*

Gold, A. 2019. "[Beating Grad School Burnout.](#)" *Inside Higher Ed.*

Shives, K. 2016. "[Battling Burnout with Self Care.](#)" *Inside Higher Ed.*

Poorman, M. 2018. "[Preventing Dissertation Burnout.](#)" *Inside Higher Ed.*