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**Findings/Fall 2013**

## **The Culture of Stress at Carnegie Mellon**

**Our Public Talk,  
Personal Experience,  
Individual & Community Response**

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*A report on Rival Hypotheses,  
Options, and Outcomes  
from the CARNEGIE MELLON  
COMMUNITY THINK TANK*

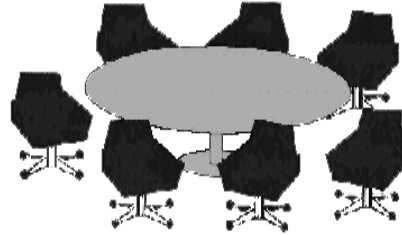
This Think Tank inquiry reveals some of the strikingly different ways CMU students, faculty, administrators and staff understand and deal with our “culture of stress.”

- Is stress a time management problem, health crisis, or a badge of honor?
- Is it rooted in academic workload or identity work?
- How do students seek help? From whom?
- How might we respond as individuals and as a community?

**The Carnegie Mellon Community Think Tank**  
Carnegie Mellon University  
[www.cmu.edu/thinktank](http://www.cmu.edu/thinktank)

## The Carnegie Mellon Community Think Tank

- Creates dialogues among problem solvers seeking workable solutions to problems of teaching, learning, and meaningful working lives.
- The Think Tank's structured, solution-oriented process:
  - ◆ Opens cross-institution, cross-hierarchy, intercultural dialogue in which students, educators, administrators, , service professionals, researchers, and community supporters meet as collaborators
  - ◆ Structures this talk into a problem-solving search for diverse perspectives, rival hypotheses, and collaborative solutions
  - ◆ Draws out untapped expertise from those rarely heard in policy discussions to build more comprehensive understandings of problems and community-tested options for action
  - ◆ Offers a scaffold for Local Action Think Tanks in individual schools and workplaces.



*Please visit our web site to explore the Findings of other Think Tanks, research on intercultural problem solving, and our guide for developing your own dialogues as an educator, human resource developer, or community group. Figure 1 at the end of this report diagrams how these inquiries are structured*

Carnegie Mellon Community Think Tank  
Dr. Linda Flower, Director  
Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh PA 15213  
(412) 268-2863 [www.cmu.edu/thinktank](http://www.cmu.edu/thinktank)

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## THINK TANK ORGANIZERS

Juan Acosta.....Junior, Hispanic Studies and Professional Writing  
Amanda Berardi.....Ph.D. Rhetoric  
Jenna Bodnar.....Junior, Professional and Creative Writing  
Zachary Branson.....Senior, Statistics and Rhetoric  
Haley Bryant.....Sophomore, Professional Writing and Decision Sciences  
Quintin Carlson.....Senior, Decision Sciences and Human Computer Interaction  
Elana Goldberg.....Junior, Creative and Professional Writing  
Connor Hayes.....Junior, Policy and Management  
Lexi Hernandez.....Junior, Global Studies and Professional Writing  
Braden Kelner.....Junior, Professional Writing  
Ryan Mitchell.....M.A. Rhetoric  
Marek Muller.....M.A. Rhetoric  
Maria Poznahovska.....M.A. Rhetoric  
Ben Shedlock.....M.A. Professional Writing  
Meghan Wons.....M.A. Rhetoric  
Carolyn Commer, Advisor..... Ph.D Rhetoric  
Linda Flower, Professor.....Rhetoric, Department of English



Members of the Leadership, Dialogue and Change Seminar, Fall 2013  
Dr. Linda Flower, Professor of Rhetoric

## AN INQUIRY INTO THE CULTURE OF STRESS AT CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

As a top 20 university, Carnegie Mellon has established itself as an academically rigorous institution. Students and faculty from across disciplines strive to produce state-of-the-art work and push the boundaries of their given fields. While CMU's expectation of excellence undoubtedly leads to innovation, many are beginning to express concerns that it also fosters a problematic Culture of Stress, which affects every member of our campus community.

In an effort to better understand how the Culture of Stress is perceived, articulated, and responded to by students, faculty and staff, the rhetoric students of the English Department's Leadership, Dialogue, and Change seminar organized and documented a Carnegie Mellon Community Think Tank. The Community Think Tank seeks out differing perspectives and experiences to productively address complex, shared problems. Working in three teams, our investigation focused on three distinct stress-related environments: how we at CMU talk about the Culture of Stress; the personal experiences of students; and the options for individual and community response.

To tap into each environment, we performed *critical incident interviews* that allowed for different members of the campus community to share their experiences with stress. Their *stories-behind-the-story* helped researchers identify overarching themes that surround the culture of stress at CMU. Next, the researchers designed *scenarios* around each theme and held roundtable discussions, where different voices came together to *rival* each other's perspectives and engage in a cross-campus dialogue about the Culture of Stress.

### *Options and Outcomes*

#### **Public Talk**

1. Where Should I Go?
2. Balance Beams
3. Identity Crisis
4. Confronting Disappointment

#### **Personal Responses**

1. Peer Checkpoint
2. Priority Checkpoint
3. Anonymous Forum
4. Failure Is Not An Option
5. Get Off Campus

#### **Community Responses**

1. Grin and Bear It
2. Passing the Buck
3. Walk it Off
4. Rethinking Personal Identity
5. Branching Out

Presented here are the results of these dialogues. The findings from each roundtable have been organized around distinct *options and outcomes*. As you read what follows, we encourage you think about how you deal with stress or help others deal with stress. Our goal is to spark a productive conversation about CMU's Culture of Stress and open up options for us as a campus. At the end of this publication, we have included a list of stress-related resources on campus, as well as a self-

test questionnaire. If you or someone you know feels overwhelmed by stress, remember, the first step toward help is knowing where to go and who to talk to.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR FINDINGS

### Ideas from Part I. *How People Talk about Stress*

#### **“Where Should I Go?”**

Students often feel like they receive contradictory advice from faculty, staff, and peers. As a result, knowing what resources to turn to for help can be difficult.

**Option 1: Know Your Resources**--Having a standard protocol for faculty to refer to could help them better advise their students about appropriate campus resources.

**Option 2: Share the Knowledge**--If faculty and staff possess specialized knowledge about stress, they might be able to act “knowledge bases” for others.

#### **Balance Beams**

Because students spend much of their time juggling school and work responsibilities, many feel like they lack a strong peer support network.

**Option 1: Find a Buddy**--Setting up a peer-mentoring program within majors could provide students with such a network.

**Option 2: Faculty and Staff Initiate Connections between Students**-- Some students need an “extra push” when it comes to meeting new people. Faculty and staff may need to help like-minded students find each other.

**Option 3: Bringing Students Back into the Loop**--When students move off campus, they may need special communications if they’re not to feel forgotten.

#### **Identity Crisis**

Students often see their identities as synonymous with their academic achievements. As a result, poor achievement leads many students to feel out of control and unsure about their identities.

**Option 1: Find a Community**-- Joining clubs, social groups, and/or volunteer organizations is one possible way for students to expand their social networks.

**Option 2: Experiment with Your Identity**--Pursuing interests off campus can help students see themselves as more than high academic achievers.

#### **Confronting Disappointment**

Students can feel overwhelmed by the often-imagined expectations of their parents and peers. They think that if they fail to maintain a certain GPA, they will disappoint those who have faith in them.

**Option 1: It’s Okay to Mess-Up**--Professors might need to explain to their students the benefits of academic “misstepping.”

## **Ideas from Part II. *Personal Experience with Stress***

- **Peer Checkpoint**  
Training successful upperclassmen as student mentors could establish a major-specific support system for underclassmen to use when they feel overwhelmed.
- **Priority Checkpoint**  
Students often fail to prioritize their commitments. Increased education about agenda setting strategies could help them better balance their personal, academic, and social responsibilities.
- **Anonymous Forum**  
An anonymous online forum might allow for students from across the campus to support each other without embarrassment.
- **Failure Is Not An Option (Except For Stress!)**  
Faculty and staff should teach stress management strategies as much as they teach course content.
- **Get Off Campus**  
Scheduling time away from campus might help students take their minds off of stressful situations.

## **Ideas from Part III. *Individual and Community Responses to Stress***

### **Social Interaction as a Source of Stress**

When students engage in extracurricular social situations, they report that conversations often turn to academics and such interactions can be a source of anxiety.

**Option 1: Walk It Off--** Taking time away from school to exercise might help students take their minds off of school responsibilities.

**Option 2: Rethinking Personal Identity--**Students should begin to see themselves as more than their academic achievements. Often this requires them to define their identities in terms of character traits, not class grades.

**Option 3: Branching Out--**Students are often members of various academic, social, and volunteer organizations. It is important for students to strengthen their social relationships within these particular groups because these connections allow for dynamic support networks.

### **Fear of Failure as a Source of Stress**

When students study hard but still earn undesired grades, they often feel like they have disappointed themselves, their families, and their professors.

**Option 1: Grin and Bear It--**By understanding that doing poorly is a natural part of the learning process, students might be able to separate their personal identities from their grades.

**Option 2: Passing the Buck--**Recognizing the limitations of their knowledge would allow faculty, staff, and peers to refer stressed students to appropriate resources.



## Findings The Culture of Stress at CMU

### *Part I* *How People Talk about Stress*

Juan Acosta, Elana Goldber, Lexi Hernandez, Braden Kelner, Ryan Mitchell,  
Maria Poznahovska

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#### **Perceptions of Stress**

Our exploration into the public talk surrounding the Culture of Stress at Carnegie Mellon began with the assumption that students talk about stress differently in different contexts. During our initial interviews, we encountered two distinct perceptions of stress: The first regarded stress as a negative influence on students' lives and health; the second revealed that for some students, stress was a badge of honor, a way to prove their intellectual worth. This perception encouraged students to take on too many responsibilities as a way to compete with their peers. The competitive nature of the Culture of Stress was intriguing because it had the potential to give us entry into some of the implicit motivations behind the work habits of Carnegie Mellon students.

To tap into these motivations, we conducted *critical incident interviews* with students, faculty, and staff. By pushing the interviewees to explain their thought processes and internal perceptions, we were able to uncover situated experiences with stress that often resulted from external pressures and false beliefs about success. Our interviews revealed three hidden stressors:

#### **(1) Students are afraid of disappointing themselves, their families, and professors.**

Our data suggests that student stress generates from the fear of disappointing the expectations they set for themselves as well as the perceived expectations of their families, professors, and peers.



**(2) Students, faculty, and staff often interpret stress as a problem that can be remedied by acquiring specific time-management strategies, study skills, and anti-procrastination skills.**

Our data suggests that members of the campus community of see stress as a technical problem that can be prevented by developing comprehensive time-management strategies, study habits, and anti-procrastination skills. However, students report that sometimes these approaches fail to fully address the social factors that lead to stress.

**(3) Students often see their identities as synonymous with their academic grade achievement.**

Our data suggests that stress can occur when students find that they aren't performing as well in college as they had in high school. For many students at CMU, academic achievement is an integral aspect of their self-concepts. Failure to excel in their classes often forces student to question both their abilities and their identities.

Below is a scenario that provides a narrative account of some stress-related perceptions that we have uncovered through our interviews. When reading the scenario, please think of how you would advise Josefina. Can you think of any alternate courses of action or perspectives that aren't being represented?

**Scenario: What's Going On Here?**

*Josefina is a junior chemistry major at Carnegie Mellon. While she always passes her classes, she often struggles to grasp the material. No matter how much work she puts in, she still makes poor grades on her assignments. To better understand why she can't seem to get a handle of her course work, Josefina goes to Student Life to discuss her grades. After an initial meeting, the Student Life representative refers Josefina to her undergraduate advisor. The following scene takes place in her advisor's office.*

**Professor X:** Have you considered dropping a course to lighten your load?

**Josefina:** That would classify me as a part-time student, and that could take away my financial aid.

**Professor X:** Have you considered taking a class as pass/fail? That way you could still receive credit and maintain your full-time standing.

**Josefina:** I wouldn't get credit for my major, and all of my classes this semester are core requirements. I feel as though I'm learning and taking away a lot from my courses. I am just not performing well on the exams. My parents expect me to graduate on time so that I can start grad school right away.

**Professor X:** I know you have gone to office hours, but have you thought of starting a study group with some friends in your major?

**Josefina:** I don't really know anyone in my major. I live by myself in an apartment far from campus, and I work five days a week, so I don't have a lot of time to meet with people.

**Professor X:** Have you thought about joining a club? Sometimes it helps to have a break from schoolwork and do something you enjoy to help you focus when it comes to your assignments.

**Josefina:** But I do enjoy chemistry. At least, I used to. I don't know, maybe I don't enjoy chemistry anymore, and I don't think I'm good enough to stay with it. I just need to get my grades up.

**Professor X:** Students often need some time to clear their heads and get back in sync with themselves. Have you ever considered taking some time off from school?

## **The Story Behind The Story**

*What is Josefina thinking?*

My parents are going to be so disappointed and ashamed. If I take a leave of absence, I won't graduate on time. If I don't graduate on time, I won't make it to grad school and I'll never have a successful career. Who am I if my dreams have to be put on hold? What are my dreams anymore? I love my major, but my classes really have me down. I want to continue, but I don't know how. If I take a leave of absence, I may fall a semester behind since the courses I am taking are prerequisites for other required courses. What if I have to graduate late?

*What is the professor thinking?*

This student clearly feels trapped. She's stuck in a major that she might not feel passionate about anymore. I really think she needs to figure out what she wants out of life. I know it sounds extreme, but maybe she should take the rest of the semester off. She needs to retouch base with herself. I have had students take time off in the past, and it seems to have really worked for them. I don't want to get rid of her, and it's not that I don't believe in her. I am just looking out for her best interests.

*What are the parents thinking?*

We want our daughter to excel at school, but we don't want her to sacrifice her health for her grades. We would support her decision to take a semester off of school if that's what she wants to do. If she needs extra time to get her degree, she should do it. In fact, we will support whatever decision she makes. It's hard for us to help her now. She's so far away, and we don't know about the resources CMU has to help her make friends or manage her grades.

*What is the Student Life Advisor thinking?*

If the student is struggling, and the best option is for them to take a semester off, professors should suggest that the student take the semester off. A student's health should never be compromised for her academics. While students might feel as if

we are trying to get rid of them, we only want what is best for their health and we hope that we can make them realize just because an option is stigmatized doesn't mean it's a bad one.

*What are Josefina's friends thinking?*

We've barely seen her around. We had no idea she was having trouble. We always ask her to hang out with us on the weekends, but she always says that she's busy. We thought she was just working really hard to get more A's so she could boost her QPA. We didn't want to be pushy, so we let her do her own thing. Now that we hear that she might take time off, we realize that maybe there was more that we could have done. We want what's best for her, but we don't want to give her bad advice, especially about something so important.

## **Options and Outcomes**

Presented below are some potential outcomes and options for action. These findings came from our critical incident interviews and round table discussion. In many cases, the perspectives you will read represent a combination of student, faculty, and staff voices. Combining these perspectives allowed us to capture the complexity of Josefina's situation.

### **Decision Point One: Where Should I Go?**

Josefina is reluctant to lighten her course load. Removing a course from Josefina's schedule puts her at risk of carrying less than 36 units, which would reduce her to the status of a part-time student. As a part-time student, Josefina would no longer qualify to receive the same amount of financial aid. She worries that her options are limited.

### **What's the Problem?**

Josefina fears that she will lose her financial aid if she drops a course; however, Josefina is reluctant to take the professor's advice about taking time off because it seems like giving up.

#### **Option 1: Know Your Resources**

For professors advising students about academic concerns and overwork, it might be helpful to generate a standardized protocol that outlines all of the possible campus resources available to struggling students.

*Professor Thinks:* I wish I could be more helpful to Josefina. I think one way for her to feel less stressed is to lighten her course load or take some time off. Unfortunately, I haven't dealt with financial aid since I was a college student and don't know how flexible they are when it comes to aid disbursement. All I can do is tell her what worked for previous students. I wish I could be of more help, but before Josefina can make a decision, she will need to talk to the financial aid office. Maybe they can help her or find a school resource that can.

*Financial Aid Officer Thinks:* Financing college is difficult, especially at a school as expensive as CMU. I wish that students would come visit me before making decisions that put their aid money in jeopardy. Students usually get contradictory advice when it comes to credit hours and enrollment. Unfortunately, a lot of this advice neglects to consider the nuances of our financial aid policies. By outlining the loan process for struggling students, I think I could help them better understand what their available options are.

*Josefina Thinks:* I'm stressed and would really like to drop one of my classes, but I remember my financial aid advisor telling me I couldn't drop below 36 units. All I know is that I won't get the same amount of aid money if I'm not a full-time student. I wish someone would explain what exactly will happen or where I could go to ask for advice. I feel like when I go to my teacher's for advice they don't take into account the financial implications of dropping a course or taking time off. This school is so expensive; I need the aid money to continue going here.

*Administration Thinks:* A lot of students get contradictory advice when it comes to what options are available to them. Since students usually ask their professors for advice before anyone else, I wonder if there is a way to better to help professors direct their students to the appropriate resources.

## **Option 2: Share the Knowledge**

Professors with special knowledge about student stress can act as knowledge bases for others in the Carnegie Mellon community to become educated themselves about helping students deal with stress or referring students to different resources. For example, professors with field work related to stress can share their studies. More simply, professors who have interacted with stressed students in the past can share their experiences to less seasoned professors.

*New Professor Thinks:* Professors who have been teaching for a while can help new professors to handle situations related to student stress. As a new professor, I do not have much experience handling situations that may extend beyond the defined role of a professor, such as a student's personal problems. I have not thought about helping all students specifically, only those who reached out to me or showed an interest in a class. A seasoned professor can help me to realize when to reach out to a student who is not performing well and how to recognize when to reach out.

*Seasoned Professor Thinks:* Even with special knowledge that is shared, professors may not be able to help a student in certain situations. For example, a student may perform poorly because they are committing to too many things, but a professor cannot stop them from what they want to do. Professors may be able to help in certain situations, but there are some situations where a referral is better and increased knowledge would still not make professors experts (a referral may still be better).

*Another Professor Thinks:* New knowledge may not be helpful since students may not want to talk to professors even if the professor reaches out to them. Some people keep personal information to themselves, and do not want to share that with their professors.

*Some Students Think:* Faculty appear to be available to talk, though many do not openly invite students to talk to them. Some professors appear as if they care about individuals, while others may only seem to care about the class as a whole. Some professors can be helpful with advice or providing information and connections to outside resources.

*Student Affairs Member Thinks:* People with special knowledge may be able to manage certain issues appropriately. They may be able to start peeling back the layers of a student to understand them so that they can identify possible resources or appropriate advice within the realm of a professor. Boundaries for a professor's role is not as clearly defined at Carnegie Mellon since the talented staff has so many areas of special knowledge that they may be able to provide to students.

*Think Tank Thinks:* The role of a professor at Carnegie Mellon should be explored. If the role of the professor includes helping students manage stress or find campus resources that can be helpful for them, then professors should be as widely educated about stress as possible, and they should share best practices or techniques with one another. If student stress does not fall within the realm of their job, then professors should be able to refer students to resources that can better help them if a student explicitly asks for help; professors do not have to reach out to the students, though, if student stress is not part of their role.

## **Decision Point Two: Balance Beams**

In addition to a full academic course load, Josefina works during the week. She feels as though there is not enough time in a day. According to Josefina, if she is not at her job, she is at the library completing homework and studying for exams. Josefina constantly struggles to disengage with academic work long enough to engage in campus activities or make connections with peers in her major.

### **What's the problem?**

Josefina struggles to balance work and homework and friends. She feels that she does not have enough time to create a strong support network, which could help her alleviate some of her stress. Some of the interesting options that emerged include:

#### **Option 1: Find a Buddy**

One option might be setting up a peer-mentoring system within majors. For students like Josefina, a major-specific mentoring service might establish networks for students to talk about their academic work and about what to expect in her major.

*Josefina Thinks:* I don't have anyone I can talk to about my academic insecurities. Maybe if I had a peer mentor, I could turn to someone who has been in my place before. I could ask her what she did to cope with the stress. I definitely think it would be helpful to talk to someone who has been through it before.

*Academic Counselor Thinks:* I know what Josefina's going through. It can be difficult to build networks when all you have time for is school and work. Learning to juggle responsibilities is difficult, and it really helps to get advice from people who have managed to do it. I would be more than happy to meet Josephina for coffee and chat about school. I can give her some insights into my experiences.

*Professor Thinks:* I can refer her to some upperclassmen who are interested in similar things. It might help her build connections and get a student perspective on school work. She might be more comfortable talking to someone who is closer in age to her. Plus, she'll probably get more useful advice since professionalism won't be as big of a concern..

*Parent Thinks:* I don't know how helpful I can be for Josefina. I know she needs to talk to someone who is familiar with her field and get to know some other students at school. Part of the college experience is building peer networks. She needs to put herself out there and get to know more people.

*Think Tank Thinks:* Assigning an upperclassman to mentor an underclassmen might be a way to help individual departments keep track of their students' academics and mental health. Also, peer mentors can give insights into the classes they've taken, advice on what faculty, information on different resources around campus, and act as a liaison between students and faculty.

## **Option 2: Faculty and Staff Initiate Connections Across Student Networks**

Some students need that extra push. To help establish connections, faculty have suggested that they could introduce like-minded students.

*Josefina Thinks:* I don't have time to connect with fellow students. Even if I did, I wouldn't know how to begin.

*Professor Thinks:* Sometimes, students are too shy to ask for help. But, if a student establishes connections with other students, especially those with common interests, she might be willing to seek outside help. I could keep an eye out for students that Josephina might relate to. If I felt like it was appropriate, I could email the students and see if they were willing to get together for coffee.

## **Option 3: Bring Students Back into the Loop**

Students who live off campus are not tracked and kept in the loop in the same way that students who live on campus are. By keeping those students updated with what's going on campus and reaching out to them will help make sure they don't fall out of touch with the campus community.

*Josefina Thinks:* Since I don't live on campus, I never know what's going on around CMU anymore. I would like a way to still be in contact with the campus community.

*Student #2 Thinks:* I went to live off campus because I don't want to be monitored by the administration and campus people anymore. I want to be able to feel as though I'm independently handling my life and my obligations.

*Student #3 Thinks:* Even though I live off campus now and thought it would be good to live independently, I feel lonely and out of touch. How can I still maintain my independence while still feeling like I'm part of the campus community?

*Professor #1 Thinks:* I can't keep track of what my students are doing outside of school. It is their obligation to make sure that, despite whatever else they have going on, they are able to complete their coursework.

*Professor #2 Thinks:* I don't want Josephina to feel so overwhelmed; if she's not able to cope with her obligations outside of school, the repercussions will reflect in her academics. I want to be able to reach out to her and help in any way I can, but I don't know what my boundaries are in terms of establishing a relationship with her so that she can come to me and tell me if something that is bothering her is affecting her work. I wish that she would communicate with me so that we can arrange something.

*Parent #1 Thinks:* I worry about Josephina now that she no longer lives on campus. I worry that if anything were to happen, she is on her own. I wish there was some way that the administration could still reach out to her to make sure she's okay.

*Parent #2 Thinks:* Josephina is an adult now and it would be good for her to try to live on her own. She can't be babied all her life; she needs to learn to mature.

*Administrator #1 Thinks:* We send out emails but students don't bother reading them. How can we "keep track" of students who don't respond to the outreach we already do?

*Administrator #2 Thinks:* What the administration does now is not enough. Sending out emails doesn't always work as just the only means of getting in touch with the students. Perhaps the students don't want to be felt like they're being monitored by the school. How can the school community keep in contact with the students living off campus while still maintaining a peer relationship rather than a "parent-child" one?

*Think Tank Thinks:* Students get bombarded with a variety of emails all of the time and often skip over ones that they think aren't important or one where they don't know what they are about in just reading the "Subject." To be able to filter emails into Social/Events, Primary/Important, News would give students a way to prioritize and sift through the emails without getting overloaded with information and looking at the ones that are important to them in a particular moment.

### **Decision Point Three: Identity Crisis**

Josephina's identity is rooted in academic achievement. Prior to Carnegie Mellon, she was at the top of her class. And, although there were times at which she struggled throughout her freshman and sophomore year, Josefinna always passed her classes.

### **What's the problem?**

Josefina feels out of control and is unsure of her identity. She questions whether or not she is successful as an individual, if she is unsuccessful as a student.

#### **Option 1: Find a Community**

Reach out to campus groups that she identifies with, perhaps a group based on her ethnicity, faith or interests.

*Josefina Thinks:* I am so far from home, and I feel so disconnected from my roots. I wish I could find a group of peers who share the same traditions as me.

*Josefina's Parents Think:* We know it is hard for Josefina to maintain the lifestyle she grew up with while she is at school, but if she could fuse this culture back into her life, she would not be as lonely.

*SALSA (Spanish and Latin Student Association) Thinks:* This club was founded to create a close-knit community of Hispanic students right here on campus by celebrating Latin American and Spanish cultures. We host interactive events to foster this community. Josefina should definitely consider joining this club. We think she would feel at home here.

#### **Option 2: Experiment with Your Identity**

Join activities to find new identities.

*Josefina Thinks:* It may be fun to try something new, but I'm scared to get out of my comfort zone. What if I make a fool out of myself?

*Students Think:* It is fun being part of clubs that have nothing to do with my major or prior interests. By expanding my horizons and joining new initiatives, I have developed so many new interests and hobbies. It has been fun learning about various activities and myself.

*Campus Organization Leaders Think:* Being involved in extracurricular activities gives students a break from academics, and a chance to enjoy themselves. There are over a hundred student organizations on campus. While a few definitely appeal to Josefina's culture and interests, she may consider trying something new to foster different interests.

### **Decision Point Four: Confronting Disappointment**

Josephina struggles over whether or not to tell her family about her academic problems. Her parents have invested a lot of money into her education, in order to make her dreams of becoming a chemist come true.



## What's the Problem?

Throughout Josephina's academic struggles, a pungent worry is disappointing her family and herself. She is afraid of her parents' money going to waste, and letting go of her dreams.

### Option 1: It's Okay to Mess-Up

Professors can open a dialogue about productive misstepping.

*Student Thinks:* We feel pressured to succeed from ourselves, parents and professors. But being constantly successful becomes an even bigger burden than failing. Failing, after being constantly successful, is like saying we cracked, or we're actually not good enough.

*A Professor Thinks:* Students often feel their grade is more important than what they learn. To them, it is more important to get an A than it is to learn and understand the materials.

*Parents Think:* Of course we want Josefina to have a great GPA. However, we understand how hard her classes are, and we do not want to add to her stress level and make her to feel more pressure. She just needs to do what is best for her, even if that means not doing as well in school in order to make the changes she needs. You can't put a price on happiness.

*Friends Think:* Talking about my mess-ups with my friends makes me feel so much better. I wish Josefina felt comfortable enough to share them with me.

*Student Body Thinks:* It would be cool if there were an anonymous forum where people could post their failures. That way, our peers will not only feel better getting it off their chest, but they can also see that other people fail too. It is not uncommon.

*Student Affairs Thinks:* Living in a dorm gives students easy access to a wide network of people. If Josefina lived in a dorm, she could easily confide in her failures with her RA, and feel better knowing she is not alone.



## Findings The Culture of Stress at CMU

### *Part II* *The Personal Experience with Stress*

Jenna Bodnar, Quintin Carlson, Connor Hayes, Ben Shedlock

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#### Highlights of Options We Heard

There are numerous ways that Carnegie Mellon, as a whole, attempts to handle the stress of this highly rigorous academic environment. At the same time, students report some confusion on where to turn when they feel overwhelmed. In response, our Think Tank explored some options, which include:

**Peer Checkpoint:** When stress becomes overwhelming, a Peer Checkpoint could help Carnegie Mellon students to reach out to fellow students who are trained to help combat stress and procrastination.

**Priority Checkpoint:** While some students have become calendar ninjas, they are lacking the 10,000-foot view of their priorities--what activities should come first and which can be left as the wayside. A Priority Checkpoint ensures that you're working on what is most important to you, whether that would be fitness, social outings, school, or extracurricular obligations.

**Anonymous Forum:** An online forum where students can anonymously express their stress without fear of being judged would let them support one another and collaborate on their work related issues.

**Failure Is Not An Option:** Carnegie Mellon students tend to excel in their coursework but accept failure when it comes to stress! Carnegie Mellon could try to make stress management as fundamental as reading, writing, and arithmetic.

**Get Off Campus:** Leaving campus can pull students out of the Carnegie Mellon bubble that prizes work over everything else.



## Our Initial Sense of the Problem

Before the final Think Tank Round Table discussion, our research had allowed us to develop two scenarios that tentatively define the problems related to the personal experience of stress and how students use campus resources.

Many students we interviewed say that when they are at the peak of stress, they don't use campus services because:

- ▶ They don't recognize when they *need* help from such resources or other students.
- ▶ Support services don't meet their time constraints, and/ or them commit to change or to overcoming their resistance to change.
- ▶ Their fears of being judged (by asking for help) actually contribute to stress.

Some students appear to structure their lives in a way that invites stress, while others say they are able to steer clear of stressful crises:

- ▶ Some students talked about balancing their academic work with social life and healthy living.
- ▶ Some engage in non-CMU responsibilities and say they get the most out of life, not just out of CMU
- ▶ But others do not build relationships, especially with their professors, so academic problems go un-addressed.



## Problem Scenario #1: Mid-Semester Slip

Meet, Julie, a student in Information Systems. While doing well so far at CMU, she is continuing to struggle to manage all of her ongoing assignments and papers. Her internal narrative reflects the voices of multiple students we have interviewed throughout this process.

"I thought last week was hell week, but this is worse. I just completed a paper for one class, and we already have another due? And then there's my other four classes... three papers and a major project due. How am I supposed to prioritize required assignments? I'm trying to stay on top of everything but I just keep feeling like I'm about to slip. It's felt like this since the second week of school. I thought this semester was going to be different!"

Julie continues to think...

“Maybe I can reach out to my professors to get help or an extension, but I don’t want to look like a weak student to them. Especially if I want to get a letter of recommendation at the end of class for an internship!

...“Maybe I should go to Academic Development, but they aren’t going to have a magical cure for managing everything. They can’t help make the hard decisions of which assignments can get done and which ones to turn in late or not do at all.” Julie continues to wonder...

...“Maybe I should go to my friends and complain about the work. It’s cathartic but doesn’t really get me anywhere.



...“I can try to complete everything while forgoing sleep and healthy activities like my daily workout. They always say you can have friends, get enough sleep or have good grades but you’re only able to pick two.”

### Story behind the story

**Student Life says:** Julie is talking a lot about her work, but she isn’t necessarily looking at outside factors that are causing stress. We can help her figure these out.

**Academic Development says:** Julie doesn’t need someone to give her a magical solution. We can give Julie strategies to manage her work from the first week of school onward so it doesn’t become so overwhelming.

**Health Services says:** Julie needs to realize that there isn’t one thing that will improve her situation. But taking a more balanced approach to her life and her situation will.

### What is the problem here?

Julie is facing a tough decision and more than her grades are at stake here. Certainly her grades in her classes and her overall GPA are important factors to consider, but feeling this much stress for the majority of the semester puts her health and mental wellbeing at risk as well. Furthermore, Julie’s relationship with her professors is at stake. If she does not complete the work, they are less likely to write her a glowing letter of recommendation for an internship; but if she asks for help, she feels she might lose their respect and that letter anyway. Something’s gotta give.

### Problem Scenario #2: Late Night Crunch Time

At 1 AM Wednesday, Amanda’s computer is open to her materials science homework that is due by tomorrow’s noon class. Covering her desk are a textbook, pages of class notes, and the PowerPoint slides from the last few lectures.

“I can’t believe that I’m still not done! I did this so fast in high school,” Amanda thinks. She dozes off at her desk. She wakes with a start, remembering the caffeine pills in her drawer. If she stays up all night, she figures she can finish the homework by class. But she feels stuck, and thoughts about what to do constantly flow through her head...

... Amanda thinks, “When I told Health Services once about taking caffeine pills, they said not sleeping actually made my work worse. Maybe if I slept a little and got up early, I’ll be able to work on it better and get through my day.

...“No, but If I sleep now, I’ll just get further behind in the club meetings and other classes I have to go to. Plus the professor will think I’m slacking if everyone else turns it in and I don’t. Maybe this is just my top priority so I just have to do it.

...“But I have friends who aren’t this stressed and they have all these other things to do, too. What if I just spend another hour, do the best I can and try to sleep after that?

...“ But that feels selfish. I feel like I need to be fair to everyone, but I can’t with all this work. But I think that’s what my friend who went to the academic counselor did. She made goals about what was important to her. Maybe I should think more about what’s important to me.”

### Story behind the story



**Health Services says:** Amanda is too close to her work. She might feel guilty stepping away from her desk at first, but after she sleeps she’ll feel better, and her mind will continue to work on the problem while she’s asleep. Rest is not idle.

**Academic Development says:** Amanda’s clearly a bright student. If she learned some specific strategies to manage her time, she could finish the work before it became a crisis.

**Amanda’s centered classmates say:** This homework is just one part of one class in school, which is just one part of your life. It’s not selfish to have other obligations. They help you stay busy so life doesn’t become all about school.

### What’s the Problem here?

Amanda is in a high-stakes, stressful situation. On the surface, her homework grade, her grade in the materials science class, and a good night’s sleep are at stake. On a deeper level, with caffeine pills and sleep deprivation in the picture, Amanda’s health and the overall quality of her work in other classes as well as this one are at risk. In addition, there are

social issues to consider – Amanda’s relationship with her professors, friends, and peers in the same clubs that she is in. If Amanda cannot find a good balance, her academics, her health, her social life, or some combination of the three, will suffer.

## An Expanded Sense of the Problem



Our Round Table discussions revealed some added dimensions of this problem as well as some reasons behind why students do what they do. It also let the Think Tank explore the options below that speak directly to these personal experiences. Some reasons experience stress are that:

Over their time there, their environment constantly changes

- ▶ From leaving home to moving off campus, students’ living situation changes frequently
- ▶ Every semester, students take new classes, some of which challenge them for the first time.
- ▶ To cope with these changes, students must forge support networks of students, faculty and staff to replace parents who “don’t understand.”

They don’t use campus resources when they are at the peak of stress because

- ▶ They don’t recognize their need help because they think they have to “fall down” first to find their limits
- ▶ The advice services’ offer on how to take control of their environment isn’t realistic, so they turn inward and do what works for them.

Students experience stress at Carnegie Mellon differently from one another because

- ▶ Some structure their lives in a way that invites stress, while others steer clear of stressful crises:
- ▶ Some prioritize non-CMU activities alongside their work;
- ▶ Others who have not dealt with academic stress before have a limited repertoire of techniques for handling crises.

Our Round Table discussion focused on some promising options, which echo comments from a variety of participants, quoted here. And we documented some of the challenges any action will want to consider.

## Option 1: Peer Checkpoint



When Eloise is stressed out she finds it hard to concentrate on her assigned homework and even her fun activities, like student organizations. It often feels like she can do nothing but exist as a stressed out human being. When this happens, she doesn’t know where to turn to – as she doesn’t really need to go to CAPS but definitely needs to talk to someone besides her friends about the stress she’s experiencing. This is when she turns to Peer Checkpoint.

By reaching out to Peer Checkpoint, she could connect with a fellow Carnegie Mellon student who is trained in handling stress and other stressed out students. This peer mentor will meet with Eloise on campus when it fits her schedule and can be a resource she turns to every week or two, or just when she needs it. During their time together, they can spend some focused time on figuring out what is important to Eloise while letting her vent her frustration. In the end, by reaching out to a peer student she gets someone who both can help her handle and control her stress, but also knows exactly what it's like to be a Carnegie Mellon student.

### Some Rivals To This

***Blind Leading the Blind:*** How can peers, who could be facing their own set of challenges, be capable of helping another student beyond being a safe person to vent to?

***There's Already Help for That:*** Aren't there already a number of student-focused university services, like Health Services, Academic Development and CAPS that can help out stressed out students?

### Option 2: Priority Checkpoint



This tool, designed for Carnegie Mellon students, would focus on setting up and understanding one's priorities. By loading in the weekly time constraints of school and homework, extracurricular activities, social outings, and daily routine items students can ensure they are spending time on the most important aspects of their life. They can ensure they don't book 200 hours worth of activities in a 168-hour week.

Jeff is working hard on his assignments, but can't seem to have enough time to eat regularly during the day, see his friends often, or fit in any time to focus on applying for an internship. Instead of focusing on scheduling time for each activity, Priority Checkpoint asks a series of questions and then helps Jeff to rank what activities have the highest priority. By also providing helpful tips on ensuring everything gets done, Jeff can be ensured that whatever he's working on is the most important and perfect thing to be doing at that time.

### Some Rivals

***Being a Student First:*** How can a student place things above academics? You are a student first.

***Forgetting the Details:*** What about planning the day-to-day? If you focus on what you should be doing long-term, you'll miss the details of what is due tomorrow, and the next day. You'll ignore what is urgent.

### Option 3: Anonymous Forum



The idea is to create a judgment free space where students can anonymously discuss their stress. This discussion cannot only be a form of cathartic expression, but also let's students feel less alone with their stress. An anonymous discussion would eliminate the fear students have of being judged and would allow students to discuss issues they might not normally speak about. Students we interviewed often said that just having someone to vent to help them relieve their stress, so this looks like it could be very helpful.

Furthermore, students could support each other and collaborate through this anonymous forum, possibly helping each other with stress relief techniques or even working on specific problems with their homework. The anonymous forum would not be restricted to homework help, but would allow a space for discussion about any issue a student was struggling to overcome.

This option looks like it would most feasibly be carried out through an online forum. Logistically, it would be easiest to maintain anonymity online. In addition, students would be more likely to use this option if it were online simply because of convenience. They would not have to adhere to office hours or walk across campus to access the forum if it were online. An online forum would allow for 24-7 access to a supportive space, and would help contribute to a sense of community because it would give students something around which to unite and allow students to support one another.

#### Some Rivals To This

***The Derailer:*** As with anything that happens online, an online forum opens the possibility for students to misuse the space, especially if it is an anonymous forum. There is a chance that students would go onto this forum simply to derail the conversation and would post about things that are completely irrelevant to the topic of stress culture at Carnegie Mellon.

***Misery Loves Company:*** While talking to others about stress can be a form of stress relief for some, an online forum could easily turn into a place where people go to complain but do not get anything out of it. This would need to be a helpful space where students can help each other and support each other, but it has the potential to become more of a commiserating space and less of a productive space.

***A Productive Distraction is a Distraction Nonetheless:*** If a student is stressed enough to need to talk about his or her stress, this student probably has a lot of work on his or her plate and might not feel that he or she has the time to make use of this forum. Much like students forgo sleep or daily workouts in order to complete homework, an extremely stressed student (one who would benefit most from this type of forum) might see this as a



distraction and time that could be spent working. The students who need the forum most might not use it.



#### **Option 4: Failure Is Not An Option—Except for Managing Stress**

Students and staff agree that college is a big transition. Work gets harder, and students change housing each year, sometimes moving off campus. Some students never had to work hard in high school and a counselor notes that just because a strategy succeeded in year one, “doesn’t mean it’s going to work in your second or third year.” The disagreement seems to be how and even whether you need to successfully manage *this* problem.

Unlike succeeding in their classes, students believe they need to fail in stress management to learn it. “It’s hard to know your limit ‘til you’ve reached it,” and “I just kinda tanked because it got hard all at once.” A student felt lucky that she got through an Econ class. When she didn’t understand the professor in class, “I just had to put in more work myself... If it had been something more technical, it wouldn’t really have worked out as well.” For many students, the only choice when the going gets tough is to keep on going.

#### **Some Rivals To This**

***Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, and Stress Management.*** We need to treat the stress management skills as just as fundamental as the skills people learn in their disciplines. Just as you try to solve a problem set multiple ways, students need to approach their stress creatively. A counselor thinks that “the willingness to try out different strategies... needs to happen a little more.”

***University staff aren’t making empty suggestions when they suggest creativity.*** The Health Services mini offers fundamental tools for dealing with stress: “when we actually put down all the things that they’re trying to do...in a time plan, it works out to be like 30 hours per day.” Such exercises engage students in basic conversations about what they can realistically do, much like an academic course helps them see the world in a new way.

***Hindsight is 20/20:*** Students don’t necessarily believe that they are failing when they hit a wall, but that they are gaining lived experience that will help them deal with stress in a personally effective way in the future. And some don’t like having advisors “tell us that you should know what your limits are...for them, hindsight is 20/20.”

## Option 5: Get Off Campus

Students often don't consider the world off campus. A freshman recognized that "we're in this, like, bubble, where like, your school-work is the most important thing. I get really stressed when I realize that the only thing you have to look forward to for a weekend is homework."

Students can go off campus to gain valuable perspective on how their work fits into their broader priorities. It can reboot students' energy levels so they can come back "ready to do [their] work." Students who go off campus will also encounter different worldviews that put their stress values in check. It the effect of meeting people off campus who "have normal lives."

What students do off campus isn't the most important part, either. Instead, the time they spend going there can clear their heads. One freshman likes going to a new coffee shop that opened up 10 minutes away from campus, and the 20 minutes it takes her to walk there and back is just the respite she needs.

### Some Rivals To This

***I Can't Leave Until It's Done:*** Students see work as their top priority, and feel guilty if they don't finish it before doing other things. "I have one friend who was afraid if he goes off and spends time, he'll come back and realize he should have spent that time on other work he had to do." In fact, Health Services notes that many students feel guilty about abandoning their work before it's done.

***I Don't Have the Resources to Leave Campus:*** There are lots of reasons students might not be able to leave campus. Some might commute from cash flow to no transportation. The alternative can be prioritization—students "taking control of their environment," rather than changing it. Some do it with a calendar, which helps them schedule time for themselves by "marking it down and seeing exactly how much time I had in the day." Even if you don't leave campus, you can still find time while you are here.



## Findings The Culture of Stress at CMU

### *Part III* *Individual & Community Responses to Stress*

Amanda Baradi, Zachary Branson, Haley Bryant, Marek Muller, Meghan Wons

#### **The Problem We Were Trying to Tackle**

Seeking to engage a community in productively responding to a problem, the Carnegie Mellon Think Tank model encourages differing perspectives, especially voices that may not typically be heard. Although we approached our exploration of Carnegie Mellon University's "culture of stress" with open minds, our early data showed that stress was a real problem on campus, with implications for students, faculty, and administrators. On an everyday basis, students encounter stress trying to balance school, work, extra curriculars, family, and other competing priorities. Faculty and administrators recognize that stress is a problem but often feel unsure of how to respond to students and what their role should be. So we sought to work with the campus community to name both possible causes and options for agency. Throughout our project, we increasingly saw how each member of the CMU community has agency in addressing personal stress or in helping to address the stress of others.

The challenge of our "Individual and Community Response" Think Tank, therefore, was three-fold:

**1) Understand what we named, "the culture of stress" at Carnegie Mellon University.** How do students, faculty, instructors, and administrators view the stress culture? How does stress manifest itself in different community members? How are some productively dealing with it? To understand the culture of stress, we conducted informal and critical incident interviews, as well as collected data about stress at CMU and on college campuses, in general.

**2) Present an adaptive challenge for community members to engage in by discussing options, presenting rivals, and sharing personal stories.** We engaged members of the campus community in a Round Table discussion, where we shared scenarios developed from our critical incident interviews. Although many people perceive stress as an individual problem, we challenged our RoundTable participants to think about how we could respond to it as a community. Based on our critical incident interviews, we hypothesized that many people have agency in responding to not only their own stress, but also the stress of other community members. We elicited “stories behind the story” to really get at what the characters in our scenarios were thinking and feeling. Furthermore, our Round Table participants discussed options for action and presented rivals to those options.

**3) Present our findings to the campus community with the hope that the discussion will continue.** This findings book is the result of our research. It highlights options for action and also rivals to those options. While we don’t intend for this book to be a proposal of solutions, we do hope it raises awareness in the campus community about some of the options we have, as a community, to respond to stress.

**As you read these findings, we ask you to consider how you might rival the options that are presented and perhaps start a dialogue of your own.**

### **The Stress Culture at CMU: An Overview of Findings**

- Students’ identities are often tied to their academic success.
- For students who do not have networks of support, stress can become overwhelming very quickly. Students find support in a variety of networks, including student organizations, study groups, and family relationships.
- Students who are not struggling with stress are often still interested in learning how to respond to the stress of their classmates in a helpful way. However, these students may feel that they are not prepared or qualified to do so.
- Although low grades are a major source of stress, many CMU students feel that a grade of C or below is a necessary and even helpful part of college. Students acknowledge that not everyone can get A’s and that a low grade can send a valuable message that ‘you can do better.’
- Students experience generalized stress in relation to their coursework, family, and friendships; however, they often struggle to determine where they should turn for help because they are unsure of the primary source of their stress.

## Collaborative Problem Scenarios

*These dramatizations based on our data suggest ways students experience stress at CMU*

### Scenario 1

[SARAH sits at a table in the UC eating lunch and talking on the phone with her parents.]

**Sarah:** I'm not sure I can handle another semester at this rate. ...Yes Mom, I do understand taking time off may not work financially, but...I just don't think I can do this anymore. Okay...yeah...I'll try to do better. Ugh... I have to go now. Bye.

**Story Behind the Story / Sarah is Thinking:** ... *I don't know what I'm going to do. If I can't pull my grades up, my parents will be so mad. I never did that badly on my assignments, but recently I'm just too anxious even get started on them. I can't even measure up to my classmates. They've already got summer internships...in October! I just want to take next semester off. But if I do, I might lose my scholarship money. My family can't afford full tuition.* [SARAH's friend JENNY approaches and joins her at the table.]

**Jenny:** Hey Sarah, have you started looking into your classes for next semester? I'm thinking about Chem Lab, Calc III, Thermo, and either intro to Civ E or Intro to Mech E, but I can't decide...

**Sarah:** Ugh, I'm so stressed about this semester already. I don't even want to think about the next one. Can we please talk about something else?

**Story Behind the Story / Sarah is Thinking:** *All we ever talk about is school. Can't we just talk about silly things over lunch? This conversation is already stressing me out. Do I change the subject? Or I could just confess to her how much I'm struggling right now? What if she thinks I'm dumb?*

**Jenny:** Sure. What are your plans for the summer? Are you going to get an internship? I was thinking I might try to apply in both California and here so I have choices, but I'm not sure. I'm a little worried about the competition, but it's important I score a good internship to look good for med school.

**Story Behind the Story / Jenny is Thinking:** *Sarah's been so jumpy and defensive lately. I used to really like hanging out with her, but now I'm not sure. Dealing with her stress is stressful for me!*

**Sarah:** Oh my God, can't we just talk about Halloween or something?!

**Story Behind the Story / Jenny is Thinking:** *Wow, that was rude. But then again, maybe she needs my help. What can I even say? Was I like this freshman year? I guess everyone freaks out at CMU at some point. Or maybe it has nothing to do with school and she is having other problems. I could suggest CAPS, but I don't want to offend her.*

**Story Behind the Story / Sarah is Thinking:** *I just can't seem to get away from the stress here. I don't know who to ask for help. College was supposed to be the best time of my life. Perhaps I should transfer to a Division I school where people spend their Saturdays at the football field instead of in the library. But if I leave, I'll disappoint everyone--my parents, my professors, myself.*

## **Scenario 2**

[ROBIN, a freshman, has just gotten a C on her first exam. It is the first C she has ever received, and the class in question is for her desired major. She goes into her INSTRUCTOR's office hours seeking advice.]

**Robin:** I want to talk with you about the exam. I don't understand how this could have happened. I've never gotten a C before. I *can't* get a C.

**Story Behind the Story / Robin is Thinking:** *I studied really hard for this test. Whenever I studied hard in high school, I always got an A. I went over all of my class notes and even re-read most of the chapters in the textbook. Plus, I studied until 3 AM the night before! What else can I do? What if I'm just not smart enough?*

**Instructor:** Well, it's only the first test of the semester. Still, I'm happy to go over the test results and show you where you made mistakes.

**Story Behind the Story / Instructor is Thinking:** *A C was the average grade on this test. Not all of my students can get A's, and I don't expect it of them. Anyway, there are three more exams this semester, so Robin has time to improve her grade. Is that what time it is? Shoot! I need to finish up my dissertation chapter. Why did I teach two courses this semester?*

**Robin:** Sure... [ROBIN'S eyes start to well up]

**Story Behind the Story / Robin is Thinking:** *I don't know why I'm getting emotional about this. It's just a test, right? But I feel like such a failure. Hold it together....*

**Instructor:** First, why not go take a walk in Schenley Park for a bit and clear your head?

**Story Behind the Story / Instructor is Thinking:** *It seems like this student feels overwhelmed. Maybe I should talk to her advisor? Oh, God, is she going to cry? I don't want to embarrass her, so maybe I should suggest she step outside? Did I get training on how to handle this? Oh no, now I'm panicking too!*

[ROBIN stands up and leaves the Instructor's office, closes the door, and marches to the Administrator's office with tears running down her face]

**Robin:** I think this instructor has a personal problem with me. No matter what I do, she won't give me above a C.



The characters in each of these scenarios encountered the following **decision points...**

### **Decision Point #1: Social Interaction as a Source of Stress**

When students attend social events or socialize in small groups, they find that the conversation frequently turns to academics. Students who are already feeling pressure from school-related sources may find that social interaction increases rather than alleviates anxiety. Students who are not feeling excessively stressed may also struggle to determine how to respond to the stress of their peers in daily interactions.

### **Decision Point #2: Fear of Failure as Source of Stress**

Students report that when they study hard, but still earn grades less than an 'A,' they feel they have failed and fear disappointment from others and themselves. Students' identities are often so closely tied to their academic work that low grades feel like personal failures. When faced with less-than-perfect grades, it is hard to know who or where to turn for help.

### **Options and Outcomes**

*In our Think Tank research, students, faculty, and administrators named the following options as ways in which individuals currently respond to stress. Opinions varied on the extent to which each option is a productive means of response, and participants ultimately suggested that different situations call for different types of response from various members of the CMU campus community.*

#### **Option 1: “Grin and Bear It”**

*Use stress as a motivational tool*

**Description:** Students at Carnegie Mellon were at the top of their classes in high school. It follows that when a bunch of top students study together, they cannot all be the best in the class. Therefore, part of the CMU experience is accepting “failure” – that is to say, to acknowledge that you did not do well on a test, that you do not feel comfortable in a subject, or simply that you are stressed – and use it as part of a learning experience. To put it simply, use mishaps as an opportunity for future growth. If you are feeling overstressed, examine if that stress is stemming from a desire to be perfect. If it is, then steer your expectations away from being “the best” towards being “the best that you can be at that given moment.”

From a student's perspective, this might take the form of saying, "I can take a 'C' and acknowledging that while it was not what I wanted, I did my best and will do better next time." A faculty member might emphasize that while they will grade harshly, the most important aspect of a class is a student's intellectual growth. Administrators, meanwhile, might consider creating some sort of a "commiseration board" in one of the common rooms, wherein students can write out instances when they did not do as well as they wanted. In this way, campus culture can continue to promote excellence while simultaneously advocating for growth and community over stress and loneliness.

### Seeking Rivals

**A Student Says:** If you are not good at something, why keep doing it? Students come into CMU thinking they will be "x" major. But have they really explored their options? While you can't be good at everything, there is always something you ARE good at. Instead of continually failing at one thing, why not explore your options until you find the field you actually excel in? I can take a "C" and say "This major isn't as fulfilling as I thought it would be. I've always loved reading and writing though. I'll take some classes in English next semester.

**An Instructor Says:** While encouraging growth and critical thinking is good, such a teaching style works better in some major than others. There are programs here like CIT and Engineering that are ultra competitive and are graded on a curve. If some students can't keep up, it's a sign that they shouldn't be in the program. Professors have to eliminate some students because there are a limited number of seats available in the program. It's a hard truth, but sometimes there are kids who show up at CMU with loads of architecture experience who are sure that it's what they want to do, but drop out of the program almost immediately. Meanwhile, the students we initially thought would never make it keep on going and succeed. The alternative to the "weed out" courses is simply accepting fewer students into the program, and that would leave out the second type of student. And you can't just grade easier, because then grades don't mean anything.

**The Think Tank Says:** Our work shows that CMU students appreciate the tough grading curve at CMU. They want A-grades to mean something and are okay with the idea that some people will have to do poorly. Nonetheless, we also found that undergraduate students find it helpful to acknowledge that college is harder than high school, and because of this they will probably struggle. To deal with this shift, it is crucial to take poor grades in stride. Appropriate responses range from saying, "I'll do better next time," to exploring other programs. Nonetheless, disruptive stress often stems from trying to be perfect.



## Option 2: “Passing the Buck”

*Shift the responsibility for responding to a professor, administrator, or another student*

**Description:** The individual who ‘passes the buck’ in response to stress refers a stressed student to another resource or assumes that it is not his or her responsibility to respond to student stress. This option could be chosen by both faculty and peers. ‘Passing the buck’ may also be an option for a student in stress who passes the responsibility for response onto a teacher or other authority figure. The individual who is ‘passing the buck’ essentially responds to stress by deciding that the situation is beyond his or her control.

### Seeking Rivals

**A graduate student instructor says:** It is the student’s responsibility to come to me and let me know that he or she is struggling. If the student lets me know that he or she is feeling excessively stressed, I am happy to talk with them about their options such as talking with their house fellow or visiting CAPS. I do not have the training to help students cope with emotional problems, but I will point them towards someone who does if they take the first step by approaching me.

**A classmate says:** My classmate seems very overwhelmed and stressed out. I would like to help but I think she needs to talk with someone who she really trusts like a close friend or family member. Perhaps this is just her personality. I’m sure that someone who knows her better than I do will notice her anxiety and reach out to her.

**A stressed student says:** I am feeling so stressed out but don’t even know why. If a professor or TAs approached me and let me know it is okay to reach out for help, maybe it would be easier to do so. But then again, why are my professors assigning so much work in the first place? If the workload wasn’t so heavy, I wouldn’t be in this situation.

**The Think Tank says:** Our research indicates that ‘passing the buck’ or shifting the responsibility for response to stress may or may not be a productive response depending on the details of the specific situation. For example, if a student is struggling with mental health, it may be appropriate for a graduate instructor to ‘pass the buck’ by referring the student to CAPS. Nevertheless, the instructor can still play an important role in stress response by helping the student to recognize the stress he or she is feeling as a valid problem and to seek help. CMU students often need help in identifying the types of stress-related problems they are facing and therefore may struggle when they feel that they are solely responsible for stress response.

Our data shows that stress response is not typically a sole responsibility of the individual student or his or her friends or professor. Instead, various members of the CMU community can take on an active role in encouraging students to respond to stress in a meaningful and helpful way. The Think Tank therefore tells us that while ‘passing the buck’ may not always be a productive response to stress, ‘sharing the buck,’ or in other words sharing the responsibility for stress response among members of the CMU community, is a more helpful way to view the processes of stress response that students find most meaningful.

### **Option 3: “Walk it Off”**

*Distance yourself from the source of stress*

**Description:** This option stems from a critical incident interview in which a student discussed how, when she was upset about a grade and went to a professor to talk about it, she was told she should take a walk.. The option to “walk it off” is an option to respond to stress by taking one’s mind off of the stressful situation. This could mean going for a walk, run, or perhaps engaging in another form of exercise. A student could call a friend, family member, or take a break to go to a ballroom dance lesson on campus. He or she could watch a soccer game or make cookies. No matter the activity, the goal of the “walk it off” option is to create distance between oneself and the situation that is causing stress. The idea is that time and distance, even a little bit, can help create perspective and encourage a more productive response to stress.

### **Seeking Rivals**

**A student says:** I would be offended if a professor told me to “take a walk” when I was upset about a grade. This would make me feel like I was overreacting and that my problem really wasn’t important. Plus, if I’m already stressed out about schoolwork, taking time away from schoolwork isn’t going to help me. If I stayed up all night studying for a test and still didn’t do well, what will my next grade look like if I’m having fun instead of studying?

**A first year 76-101 instructor says:** Sometimes it’s hard to balance being helpful with making sure you’re not hurting a student’s feelings or going too far with your advice. When I’ve had students come to me visibly upset about a grade, I try to do what I can to encourage them to learn from the grade. But, I’ve also been guilty of giving “shallow advice” if I feel a student is overreacting to a grade and might be dealing with other stressors. It’s hard to know where to draw the line. It doesn’t seem like it’s my place to ask a student about what’s going on in her personal life or suggest she access other campus services like CAPS.

**The Think Tank says:** In discussions with both students and instructors, it seems how advice is framed plays an important role in how it is received. While we do not feel that telling a student to “take a walk” is the best option, we feel students would benefit from professors, peers, and other campus community members encouraging them to make time to step away from situations that are stressful. This doesn’t mean ignoring work or denying feelings of stress, it simply means recognizing the benefit of engaging in activities outside of academics that might help them maintain a better perspective and take disappointments in stride. We feel more research needs to be done to determine how the campus community can encourage students to “walk it off.”

#### **Option 4: “Rethinking Personal Identity”**

*Define yourself in terms other than name and major*

**Description:** College is a time when many young people seek to metaphorically find themselves. However, combatting the obstacles of college life can make constructing personal identity and having a strong sense of self worth more difficult. This inherent duality in the struggle to construct identity while also battling daily obstacles can sometimes cause students to root too much of their personal constructions of self in their academics--especially when things go awry in the classroom.

Part of the rethinking personal identity option is about students learning to reframe themselves in terms other than their names and majors. It is about learning to evaluate self worth in light of character strengths and not test scores. It is about holding on to a thorough awareness of areas to improve that aren't drawn from class rankings. And while establishing a firm sense of self is no easy task, rethinking personal identity is also about the movement towards self-awareness and the ability to problem solve issues of stress as an individual rooted in a larger societal framework and not just as a college student who did poorly on a math test.

#### **Seeking Rivals**

**Professors say:** I want students to work hard and be engaged in my class, but I don't want anyone losing sleep over the grades. Not everyone will get the A—I have to play the game too—but that's not to say that each and every student shouldn't use my class as a stepping-stone for personal growth. If a student comes to me and offers me a face and a name, I will use that working relationship to help him/her to succeed in my class. I want to know my students and their needs.

**Administrators say:** Stress culture is not unique to CMU and may not even be an issue here. Our students work hard and they produce good work. Students who are struggling should seek help in finding ways to reconcile their issues. The university provides adequate resources to help them do so.

**Students say:** I can't separate myself from the fact that I am in school, a very competitive school, and grades are the most important aspect of my life. To get good grades, get my degree, and get a good job is what I'm here for. Being good at school is who I am. I stress because school really is the most important thing to me.

**Students say:** School is important, but it's definitely not the only thing. I'm very involved with other organizations on campus, I have a boyfriend/girlfriend, I'm on a sports team. I define myself in terms of my character. Even so, I'm still stressed about schoolwork and I struggle in figuring out how to combat my issues involving stress.

**The Think Tank says:** As they are young and consistently caught up in multidimensional processes of self-reflection, most students have difficulties defining themselves. Still, most are more than aware that personal identity is a large contributor to problems surrounding campus stress and that, while no easy task, separating self worth from test scores would likely help in alleviating some of the symptoms of stress. However, students vary in the extent to which doing well in school is a priority and in terms of what factors of their lives cause them the most stress (schoolwork, relationships, general life changes).

Even so, some students are further along in the process of self-identification than others. These are the students who have a firm idea of their goals and motivations, what drives them, and those factors that impede their undertakings. These students appear to be generally better at identifying the things that cause them stress and in combatting their obstacles by using their identities as reference points. In other words, they know how they personally experience stress and how to tackle their problems based on what works for them as individuals.

Other students we talked with struggle more in separating their identities and self-worth from their schoolwork. They don't seem to be as far along the path to self-discovery or a well-defined sense of self, which makes it difficult to combat issues involving stress consistently. That is to say, one week they may handle their work loads well and be managing their time effectively and then the next week they may do poorly on a test and have a difficult time figuring out what to do next.

Both types of students admit that they can benefit from additional self-reflection, from gaining perspective, and from making better use of the resources already available to them on campus.

### **Option 5: “Branching Out”**

#### *Develop diverse support networks*

**Description:** Many Carnegie Mellon students come in ready to balance multiple tasks simultaneously. In high school they were likely an honors student, the president of one or possibly several clubs, participated in volunteer work, and had a part-time job. Thus, in college students are eager to take on just as many responsibilities. More often than not, students find college responsibilities more demanding than high school ones, and they may dedicate their time to only one or two obligations rather than many.

Because of this, though, students may find their social support group limited to only the members in that club or the students in that demanding class. Having a dynamic support group is important because the demands of life are dynamic; students may not always be facing academic stress when they are stressed, and thus do not always need academic support. “Branching Out” is a way to expand and diversify students’ social support groups so they can better balance the varied problems they may face while in college and in life.

## Seeking Rivals

**A student says:** A lot of times it's important to build a study group either in your classes or through EXCEL and SI sessions at Academic Development. But of course if all your friends are from these study groups, it's going to backfire. If you want to escape academics for a while, you may not be able to, because all of your friends are from academic-related things and thus may only want to talk about academics.

**An academic counselor says:** I think I started to become better balanced when my parents told me I needed to be. They said, "Clearly you're stressed out. There's something wrong. We don't know what you need to do, but you need to do *something*." My parents were my real support group back then, and they pushed me actively improve my life. Sometimes I worry that other students don't have that kind of support group, though, and don't know what to do when they get stressed. As an academic counselor I try to be that kind of support for students, but it would be even better if they could look towards their peers and professors for that.

**A CAPS counselor says:** I hear students say all the time that they don't know who to turn to when they need help. They aren't sure if they should go to CAPS, Academic Development, Student Life, or something else. What students don't realize, though, is that all these resources are interconnected. A student may first talk to Academic Development about a problem, but then maybe Academic Development will call me to talk with that student. A student doesn't really need to know where to go; as long as they go to someone, they'll be directed to the right person in the end.

**The Think Tank says:** It's important for students to have a versatile support network in order to tackle the many problems that they may face. While students may often look to peers for support, it can be a poor choice if their social network isn't qualified to give that support. Maybe a student is facing emotional problems that their highly academic peer group doesn't know how to handle. There is a tendency for Carnegie Mellon students to have a particular social group tied to their campus interests, but this does not mean that they have to only go to that social group when looking for support. They could go to Academic Development, CAPS, or other campus resources if they are facing problems that they don't feel comfortable bringing up with their social group.

However, students may be hesitant to go to any campus resources at all if they do not know which resource is appropriate. And even if they know what is available and what fits their needs, they may not feel comfortable approaching that resource. Ultimately, what's important is that students are connecting with some support resource rather than none at all. So maybe the best advice for hesitant students is "You don't have to be sure, simply go to a resource that makes you comfortable". That is because most if not all of Carnegie Mellon's support resources are connected in some way, and will help you find the resource that *is right* for you.

By framing our findings in terms of workable options as opposed to clear solutions, we aim to foster dialogue. We therefore hope that our findings have sparked your curiosity and left you with the desire to carry on the discussion surrounding the key issues impacting stress culture at CMU. Recognizing that the task of helping students to more effectively respond to stress involves an ongoing community commitment, we would like to leave you with the following question: How can we continue to work towards creating a campus environment that recognizes the struggles of stressed students as legitimate and challenges the assumption that excessive stress is simply a necessary aspect of college life?

## A FACT SHEET on STRESS

### What Is Stress?

**Stress** is a response to any actual or anticipated demand that is placed on us. Responses can be physical, emotional and mental, and are influenced by our perceptions, coping skills, how healthy we are, and the world around us. Stress can help us achieve many positive goals. When managed well, stress helps us complete projects, meet deadlines, or perform well in sports. However, when stress is not managed well or when we experience too much of it, stress negatively impacts our health and well-being.

<http://www.cmu.edu/health-services/stress-management/index.html>

### Productive Stress

Stress doesn't always have to be considered bad. According to recent research, the effects of stress correlate with individuals' understanding of stress. There are two types of stress: eustress and distress. Eustress can be thought of as productive stress that produces the hormones necessary to accomplish difficult tasks. Distress, on the other hand, is the malignant stress that results in sickness, anxiety, and depression. Some ways to change distress into eustress are setting priorities, praise your own work, try to avoid perfectionism. Adopting these habits of mind can help you feel less overwhelmed & save your body from hazardous consequences of distress. <http://www.brocku.ca/health-services/health-education/stress/eustress-distress>

### Stress and the College Student

- 20% of college students feel stressed all of the time. 20% of those say they are too stressed out to work at all. Overall, 26% of students say they have considered talking to a counselor or getting other professional help. Just 15 percent say they have actually done so. (NBC News)
- 85% of students feel stressed on a daily basis. Of these students, the stress comes from multiple sources including academic concerns, grades, financial worries, families, and relationships. (MTVU survey)
- 60% of students at some time have felt stress to the point of not being able to get work done. 84% of students reach out to friends to help them with their stress, while 67% reach out to parents. (MTVU survey)
- Stress is the number one factor that negatively influences academic performance according to a 2012 survey of 90,000 college students. It has been shown to lead to increased substance abuse, poor academic achievement, and suicide in college students. (LiveScience.com) And can play a part in problems such as headaches, high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, skin conditions, asthma, arthritis, depression, and anxiety. (WebMD)
- Increasing tuition rates lead to stress for students taking out loans to get through college. In a study at Indiana University students with debt were much less likely to party, and more likely to spend time studying. But also more likely to worry about that debt, leading to anxiety, stress, and sleeping problems. (LiveScience.com)

## Some Indicators of Stress CMU

- Top concerns among students who seek help at CAPS include (in order):
  - 1. Anxiety
  - 2. Depression
  - 3. Relationship concerns (depression, isolation, loneliness)
  - 4. Identity issues
- Academic Development's study skills program engaged 156 students in 2012-13. 1,057 contact hours were spent in individual sessions, averaging about 7 hours per student (a strong return rate). 95% rated their experience with academic counselors as "excellent." And 83% asked if their counseling sessions met their expectations said, "very much."
- Academic Development hosted 25 campus workshops in 2012-13 attended by 2044 students in a student body of 10,000 (i.e., about one-fifth of the undergraduates used the service). 96% said the workshops met or somewhat met their expectations. 89% indicated satisfaction with the information The workshop leaders' knowledge of topics, ability to convey ideas, give clear examples, and create a comfortable atmosphere were deemed "excellent" by 66%
- Health Services sees students for four main problems: acute illness/injury, depression, chronic illness, and anxiety disorders (including stress). Stress is a contributor to many other illnesses and to a combination of conditions (which represent 41% of cases seen). Stress is seen as a prevalent issue by Health Services.
- In a 2010 survey of 482 undergraduates, 31.5% identified stress as a top impediment to academic success. The Healthy U survey of 2013, the first to include graduate students and demographic factors as well as health, is suggesting new ways to see and alleviate the problems of stress.

## Possible Sources of CMU's Academic Culture of Stress

### *Admission Demographics 2011-2012, first year class*

Applicants	17,313		
Accepted	4,807	Acceptance rate	28%
Enrolled	1,408	Yield Rate	29%

### *Average Academic Achievement*

SAT Mathematics Score	729
SAT Critical Reading Score	677
High School GPA	3.69
Top 10% of Graduating Class	76%

### *University Rankings*

*U.S. News & World Report: 23rd in the national*

*The Times Higher Education World University Rankings: 22<sup>nd</sup> in the world. 16<sup>th</sup> in the nation*

*QS World University Rankings: 49<sup>th</sup> in the world. 20<sup>th</sup> in the nation*



## Commonly Noted Causes of Stress at College

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Finances</b></p> <p>In a May 2012 survey by Inceptia, a non-profit financial education advocate, four out of the top five areas causing stress among college students were money related ... Need to pay loan; cost of education; borrowing money for college; need to find a job after school; academic challenge of course work. <i>TIME Magazine</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Academics</b></p> <p>To some extent, students' decline in emotional health may result from pressures they put on themselves. While first-year students' assessments of their emotional health were declining, their ratings of their own drive to achieve, and their academic ability, have been going up. <i>The New York Times</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mental Health</b></p> <p>By far, depression and anxiety are the most prevalent mental health problems students confront . Second only to back pain, sinuses, and allergies. J. MacPhee, <i>ULifeline.org</i>. <i>Businessweek</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Technology</b></p> <p>Technology distracts you from developing important emotional skills, which are a sign of emotional maturity. G. Ells, Cornell Counseling and Psychological Services <i>Businessweek</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Age and Gender</b></p> <p>Freshman and sophomores had higher reactions to stress than juniors and seniors, due perhaps to the underclassmen's lack of a strong social support network and stress coping mechanisms. Females exhibited higher anxiety traits and states, less satisfaction with leisure activities, and reaction to more stressors than males—an association between stress, gender, and age. R. Misra and M. McKean, <i>American Journal of Health Studies</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Motivation</b></p> <p>An “unexpected” finding of this study was the positive relationship between academic stress and motivation. These findings may be explained by two of the items used to measure academic motivation - importance of doing well in their course and importance for doing well overall. In other words, because academic stress threatens students' course grade, the value of doing well becomes more salient. C. Struthers, R Perry and V. Menec. <i>Research in Higher Education, 41, 5</i></p>

## Some Consequences of Stress: Warning Signs and Symptoms

*Chronic Stress* can affect an individual's cognitive, physical, and social health and trigger:

<b>Cognitive Symptoms</b>	<b>Emotional Symptoms</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memory problems</li> <li>• Inability to concentrate</li> <li>• Poor judgment</li> <li>• Seeing only the negative</li> <li>• Anxious or racing thoughts</li> <li>• Constant worrying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moodiness</li> <li>• Irritability or short temper</li> <li>• Agitation, inability to relax</li> <li>• Feeling overwhelmed</li> <li>• Sense of loneliness and isolation</li> <li>• Depression or general unhappiness</li> </ul>
<b>Physical Symptoms</b>	<b>Behavioral Symptoms</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aches and pains</li> <li>• Diarrhea or constipation</li> <li>• Nausea, dizziness</li> <li>• Chest pain, rapid heartbeat</li> <li>• Loss of sex drive</li> <li>• Frequent colds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eating more or less</li> <li>• Sleeping too much or too little</li> <li>• Isolating yourself from others</li> <li>• Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities</li> <li>• Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax</li> <li>• Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)</li> </ul>

[http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress\\_signs.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_signs.htm)

## Staff, Student, and Faculty Participants

On behalf of the entire *Leadership, Dialogue, and Change* seminar, we would like to thank all those who participated in our inquiry into the Culture of Stress. Your unique insights and experiences have allowed us to approach our research from a variety of perspectives and produce a vivid picture of how stress is understood, talked about, and responded to at Carnegie Mellon University. Thank you for taking time out of your schedules to address an issue that concerns every member of our campus community.

Caroline Aker  
Amy Burkert  
Gina Casalegno  
Renee Camerlengo  
Taylor Casserly  
Ben Crites  
Jim Daniels  
John Dieser  
Emily Dobler  
Chris Donadio  
Sofia Dunderdale  
Joel Grennhouse  
Shaheen Essabhoy  
Viviana Ferre-Medina  
Emily Ferris  
Rachel Friedrich  
Nancy Geronian  
Caroline Hale  
Leah Henderson  
Aubrey Higginson  
Elizabeth Hohenstein

Linda Hooper  
April Jianto  
Juan La-Fontaine  
Emily Joyc  
Aleksander Kirchmann  
Sam Klein  
Kurt Kumler  
Sara Ladley  
Larry Lee  
Scott Martin  
Matthew Mastricova  
Alisha Mayor  
Rachel McCoy  
Hannah McDonald  
Todd Medema  
Rob Mohen  
Daniel Muller  
Angela Ng  
Owen Norley  
Mariah Ondeck  
Kellie Painter

Audrey Pasnello  
Olivia Paul  
Dorene Powell  
Ryan Roderick  
Mike Ryan  
Joni Sullivan  
Rachel Schaffer  
Rachael Schmitt  
CandaceSkibba  
Melissa Thompson  
Stephanie Wallach  
Curtis Watro  
Danielle Wetzel  
Lauren Williams  
Nick Wilson  
Michelle Wolf  
Connie Yang  
Patrick Yang  
Bonnie Youngs

## HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH STRESS?

### A Self-Survey

The Carnegie Mellon Community Think Tank on the *Responding to the Culture of Stress* discovered that CMU students have a whole repertoire of strategies for dealing with stress. And they don't always agree. Check out their stories at [www.cmu.edu/thinktank/docs/CultureOfStress.pdf](http://www.cmu.edu/thinktank/docs/CultureOfStress.pdf)

But the question this self-survey asks is:

### WHAT HAVE YOU TRIED?

#### ***CHECK OFF WHAT FITS***

*Say you feel stressed, anxious, isolated, worried about things ...*

#### **Have You Ever Tried?**

##### ✓ **Get up and Go**

- ☐ Go to a Campus Events. Live off campus? Check CMU emails for different events
- ☐ Take a lunch with a friend
- ☐ Check out the Wellness Room and see what happens

##### ✓ **Stop and Reflect**

- ☐ Keep a journal and try to describe what you are feeling and how you respond. Then look at it. See what triggers these feelings. Or ask, could I interpret the situation in another way?
- ☐ Do your reflecting with a friend, a House Fellow or RA, or a counselor at CAPS. Create a space to hear yourself think, or maybe to figure some new options out together
- ☐ Dare to ask the big questions: Who am I? What do I want to do?
- ☐ Find people you relate to: Older student in your discipline, Academic Advisor, Professor. Talk over the dilemma.
- ☐ Don't have a strong relationship yet? Identify people you admire and ask how their career developed. Show an interest in others and you can find yourself in others.

##### ✓ **Admit what's beyond your control**

- ☐ Find a place to pour your problems out
- ☐ Get help. Call CAPS

##### ✓ **Walk it Off**

- ☐ Take a brisk one when stress calls
- ☐ Take a real run, then see what you feel like right after and the next day
- ☐ Schedule a regular endorphin boost.

✓ **Grin and Bear It**

- ☐ Use stressful demands to motivate yourself
- ☐ Take a positive attitude: if I can overcome this, What an achievement!
- ☐ This stuff's hard, but I made it to CMU. Even a B will be success.

Say you feel overwhelmed by your classes

**Have You Ever Tried?**

✓ **Setting Priorities**

- ☐ What do you value? Make your time reflect what matters most.
- ☐ Put your tasks in order—prioritize
- ☐ Put your tasks in order—schedule a week ahead.

✓ **Build a Network**

- ☐ Find a 'buddy' or a peer-mentor in your major
- ☐ Talk to a professor or TA about what you are already doing to manage the situation—and could do
- ☐ Locate—or create—a study group

✓ **Explore New Strategies**

- ☐ Go to an Academic Workshop
- ☐ Explore new options with your Department Advisor and with an Academic Advisor

Or are you helping a friend deal with stress? Do you recognize your situation in any of the scenarios below?

***CHECK OFF WHAT FITS***

Does your friend frequently come to you about stress?

**Have You Ever Tried?**

✓ **Asking Your Friend Questions**

- ☐ Have you bitten off more than you can chew?
- ☐ Are you in an especially difficult class?
- ☐ Is there something else going on?

✓ **Asking Yourself Questions**

- ☐ Do I understand my friend's problem?
- ☐ Does my friend need more help than I can give?
- ☐ Do I know where to send my friend for help?

✓ **Sharing Your Interests**

- ☐ Talk to your friend about scheduling habits that work for you
- ☐ Take your friend to your favorite off-campus hang-outs

Does your friend rarely come to you about stress?

**Have You Ever Tried?**

✓ **Being There**

- ☐ Lend a sympathetic ear
- ☐ Take what your friend says seriously
- ☐ Go off-campus for coffee or tea
- ☐ Tell your friend about how you deal with stress
- ☐ Introduce your friend to someone who can relate

Do you or your friend need to go to an on-campus resource? Did you know that Carnegie Mellon offers variety of academic, physical, and psychological services to its students?

***CHECK OFF WHAT YOU KNOW***

**Did you know?**

✓ **Academic Development**

- ☐ Offers individual and group appointments to help students learn more effective study and exam prep strategies.
- ☐ Students can make standing peer-tutoring appointments by filling out a tutoring request form.
- ☐ Supplemental Instruction is available twice weekly for CMU's most difficult classes.

✓ **CAPS**

- ☐ Offers students a confidential environment to talk about their personal, academic, or psychological concerns.
- ☐ Students who are diagnosed with a psychiatric or neurological condition can request special accommodations at Disability Resources.
- ☐ Students can schedule emergency walk-in appointments from 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. and by calling 412-268-2922 after hours.
- ☐ CAPS will recommend students who require on-going care to other professionals in the Pittsburgh area.

✓ **Student Life**

- ☐ Helps students sign up for everything from intermural sports to dramatic productions.
- ☐ Offers an anonymous hotline for students to call if they have problems with friends, school, or dorm life.
- ☐ For students interested in joining Greek life, Carnegie Mellon offers a variety of service-oriented sororities and fraternities.

✓ **Global Communications Center**

- ☐ One-on-one tutoring helps students develop their written, oral, and visual communication skills.
- ☐ Tutoring is available for any student, at any level, and in any major.
- ☐ If students cannot make it to Hunt Library for an in-person appointment, eTutoring sessions can be scheduled online.

✓ **Career and Professional Development Center**

- ☐ TartanTRAK notifies you when employers post job openings in your field.
- ☐ Outlines the steps you will need to take in order to find employment after graduation--everything from how to search for jobs to how to prepare for an interview.
- ☐ You can schedule a one-on-one with a career counselor by logging into your TartanTRAK account.

✓ **The HUB**

- ☐ You can order a copy of your transcript either online or by visiting the office in person.
- ☐ If you need to take a leave of absence or withdraw from your studies, you can find the appropriate paperwork at the HUB.

✓ **Health Services**

- ☐ Nutrition services offers individual students or groups a chance to learn about healthy eating habits and how to use your meal plan.
- ☐ Students can receive confidential sexual health education as well as contraceptives and STI testing.
- ☐ Individualized stress management services are available for students who feel overwhelmed by college life.

**Make an Appointment:**

Academic Development: 412-268-6878

CAPS: 412-268-2922

Student Life: 412-268-2142

Global Communications Center: (412) 268-9633

Career and Professional Development Center: 412-268-2064

The HUB: 412-268-8186

Health Services: 412-268-2157