

Editorial

An Alarming Message About ½: Why Self-Care is Key to Building Healthy Academic Communities



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A quick glimpse at data across the health science literature indicate that the value “½” should be setting off alarms for those of us trying to build healthy academic environments. A recent predictive prevalence study projected that ½ of American adults will be classified as obese by 2030 (Ward et al., 2019). Approximately ½ of healthcare workers report feeling burnout (Nigam et al., 2023). Of college students who report drinking alcohol, nearly ½ report binge drinking (5 or more drinks) during the past two weeks (National College Health Assessment, 2023). Around ½ of adults in the U.S. have hypertension or are taking medication to control it (Virani et al., 2020). Less than ½ of students reporting vaginal or anal sex in the past 30 days indicated they used a condom most or all of the time (National College Health Assessment, 2023). More than ½ of the U.S. population has at least one chronic disease or health condition which are among the leading causes of death and disability in the United (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024).

Given these statistics, my wish for you is to focus on self-care and your health in 2025. In academic environments, the pursuit of knowledge often prioritizes intellectual development over physical and mental well-being. However, fostering a culture of self-care and personal health is crucial for the long-term success and sustainability of academic communities. Faculty, students, and staff alike often neglect their own health in favor of professional obligations, leading to diminished productivity and academic performance over time. The relentless pressures of deadlines, research demands, and the pursuit of academic excellence can take a toll on faculty and students, resulting in burnout, stress, and a decline in overall well-being. We neglect exercise, healthy eating, avoiding or reducing our use of smoking, drugs and alcohol, and evidence-based mental health strategies to improve anxiety, depression, and stress. Chronic stress, sleep deprivation, and poor nutrition are common among individuals in high-pressure academic settings, and these factors negatively impact cognitive function, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships.

So can we all agree that any 2025 resolutions should include a focus on self-care and personal health? By emphasizing self-care, institutions can build healthier, more resilient academic communities that thrive both intellectually and personally. Self-care is more than a personal choice; it is fundamental aspect to building a sustainable academic environment while serving as a model for students. When faculty and staff prioritize their health, it



exemplifies the model of health-conscious leadership and demonstrates the importance of balancing academic ambition with personal wellness.

Academic institutions have a responsibility to support the health of their community members, not only through offering mental health services and wellness programs but by creating a culture that normalizes self-care. Policies that encourage flexible work schedules, mental health days, and time for physical activity can play a crucial role in this cultural shift. Institutions should also create spaces for mindfulness and stress relief, ensuring that self-care is not seen as an afterthought but as a vital component of academic life. This issue includes articles that address approaches and challenges for self-care essential for building healthy, productive academic communities. Take time, read through these, and reflect on how 2025 will be your year for “you.”

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