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## Professor Stressor

During any typical semester, students are going to stress about one thing or another. During an atypical semester where there is a global pandemic, stress levels are automatically raised. The worst is when the professors, who are in charge of keeping all assignments organized during this hectic time, are unable to do just that. Even pre-pandemic, this issue is still relevant; however, it has become more prevalent now as many courses have moved virtual. First of all, professors can be disorganized with class meeting times and/or assignments. Many students have experienced professors being last minute with sending virtual class links as well as due dates for assignments or exams. Another issue is that on Blackboard, some professors do not keep their assignments organized and do not communicate via email or Blackboard Announcements to bring clarity. Lastly, professors may have unrealistically high expectations about how much work students are capable of doing. Many students do not have a quiet place to do work, and on top of that some professors are giving more work than usual since classes have moved virtual. We must put on our empathy caps and acknowledge that professors are forced to learn all of this technology and do things that they are not used to doing in order to control a virtual or hybrid class. Although students can be understanding about why their professors are being disorganized or have unrealistic expectations, it does not change the fact that it makes students feel a high level of stress.

In a situation like this, you want to be careful to not handle it in a way that will be even more detrimental to yourself. One unhealthy coping style you want to avoid is letting the stress build and build until you reach a stage of burnout. Once you are burnt out, you can no longer be productive. Not only will you be fried mentally, but it will not be easy to be in a happy mood generally. It would also not be healthy to isolate yourself throughout this period of struggle. Some things can be dealt with on your own, but if you need someone to talk to, you should not keep this

issue all in your head. If you just continue working with this professor's unrealistic expectations and don't give yourself a break for relaxation or self-care, then the problem can only get worse over time. Another ineffective route would be continuing through the semester without communicating with the professors that there is a serious issue that is causing you stress. How can the professor help you/fix the issue if they do not know there is an issue? Not only that, but you could potentially be the voice for multiple students that feel the same way as you and are too afraid to advocate for themselves. Professors are not malicious, they are not doing things to purposely make your life difficult; let them help you!

That being said, one healthy way to manage this stress would be to email the professor advocating for your needs. There is a high possibility that they will offer some sort of solution, and even if not, there is no harm in asking. To deal with the workload, you can always make a to-do list and chunk it into sections so that it does not look as intimidating. In regards to the disorganization, you can put some of the control into your own hands and make your own master list of assignments for your classes. This gives you the power to organize your work in the most effective way for you. If you are taking virtual classes and struggle with having quiet time to go to class or get work done, a good strategy would be to make a plan with whoever you live with where you have designated quiet time. This can mean sending a mass text, putting times into a calendar, or putting a sign on the door when you need space without interruption. This may help decrease the stress of the workload, because at least now you have a space where you know you can focus and be unbothered. Now, a lot of these strategies will physically help the situation, which may lead to emotional relief, but it is still important that you allow yourself opportunities for more immediate emotional relief. If your professor's disorganization or expectations are having a significant effect on your mental health, you could confide in a friend/family member/significant other about your

worries as well as taking time for self-care. You can even talk to a counselor if you want to vent and receive advice on coping strategies.

The Counseling Center is one of WCSU's best resources. It is completely free for students, and they have even adjusted to the pandemic by including telecounseling sessions. If you do not have the time or desire to book an appointment, the Counseling Center website is beneficial on its own; it has links with ideas about how to deal with stress, how to implement self-care into your life, how to manage pandemic/isolation stress, and so much more. If you are having an issue with a professor, you can also reach out to your school's dean or your department head. If you present anything in a genuine and respectful way, they are likely to offer whatever help they can.

If this issue makes you feel overwhelmed, you need an activity that can relax you, bring your heart rate down, and recenter you. For some, this may be meditation, deep breathing or yoga. For others, it can be having a cup of tea with your favorite book/show or spending time with your favorite person. It might be none of these things for you; find what works with YOU. Every individual is different, therefore everybody's self care practices are different. Your routine must be crafted by you, for you. Knowing what relaxes you can help prevent reacting harshly to the stressors that are caused by professors' poor planning. If you plan for a self-care session right before your school day begins, or even right before you see a specific professor that stresses you out, then you can go in with a clear head and be ready for whatever they throw at you, and maybe even be in a better headspace to advocate for yourself and your needs. This puts some of the control back in your hands even if your professors are not keeping up on their end.

This combination of self-care, prevention, and planning can help build resilience for coping in the future. If you follow your stress management plan when possible, cope in a healthy way, take time for yourself and advocate for your needs, you will feel stronger and more ready to face

this problem again the next time it occurs. You will learn that advocating for yourself in a respectful way can take you far. If you try it for the first time you try it and see results, you will learn for the future that this is a great step to take. However, even if it does not work out the way you hoped, that does not mean that it won't be effective to communicate other times in other situations. Communication is key, and people cannot help you or make changes if you never tell them that there is something that needs to be changed. That being said, if not much can be done on the professor's end, or they do not implement the changes that you would like to see, you must practice acceptance. What you can do is accept the situation for what it is and be at peace with the fact that you have done everything that you could to fix the situation. This is the point where you must practice your coping strategies and stress management plan and see it go to work. When something stresses you out and you do not feel in control of it, you must do what you can to regain control in the situation. If you advocate for yourself, communicate effectively, take advantage of your resources and positive people in your life, and practice self-care, that stress does not stand a chance against you.