
A Multicomponent Stress Management Program for College Students

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An 8-week stress management program has been developed for students at the Rochester Institute of Technology. The authors describe the content of this program.

At the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), an innovative stress management program has been implemented. Although stress management interventions of various types are found on college campuses (Carnahan, Tobin, & Uncapher, 1981; Kolko, 1980; Mallinckrodt, 1983; Romano, 1984), the RIT program relies exclusively on an experiential format. The program components were chosen as ones students could later pursue on their own or through campus courses, workshops, clubs, or activities. The program, which has been offered quarterly since 1982, began in response to expressed student needs.

The program is co-sponsored by the Student Health Service and the College Counseling Service. The program leaders are a registered nurse, who is the health education coordinator at the Student Health Service, and a mental health counselor from the College Counseling Service. The goals of the program are (a) to help students understand the components of stress and how stress operates in their lives, and (b) to promote healthy methods of managing stress. The intent is to expose students to various stress management techniques with the understanding that individuals will ultimately choose different strategies based on their personalities and life-styles.

The program is offered three times each academic year and there typically is a 10-person limit, although there have been as few as 4 students and as many as 13. Approximately 30 students participate each year. At the end of the program, students rate each component's helpfulness in reducing their stress. Students are required to pay \$10, which is refundable if they complete at least seven of the eight weekly 1-hour sessions. In 2 years, only five students have missed more than seven sessions. Each session is described below.

Session 1. Students are asked to select one member to stand up and sing a song for the group. The possibility of having to sing usually makes students quite anxious. This experience (no one actually sings) is used to explain the physiology of stress, the definition of stress and stressors, and the mental and physical manifestations of stress.

Session 2. In this session, students are trained in progressive relaxation. Salter's (1961) model is used for these exercises.

Session 3. A guest aerobics instructor conducts this session. Yates (1979) described aerobic activity as a stress reduction technique, noting that "vigorous activity in the proper proportions develops cardiovascular fitness . . . [and] exercise forces you to relax when it's over" (p. 116).

Session 4. A yoga instructor leads this session. Students have consistently rated the yoga exercises very positively.

Session 5. This is the only session dealing specifically with short-term stress management strategies. The most successful strategies have been (a) visual imagery, (b) students' positive statements about themselves, and (c) breathing exercises.

Session 6. The "Red Barn" session can be likened to productive play. The Red Barn, in which some activities sponsored by RIT's Outdoor Experiential Education (OEE) program are held, is an actual barn owned by RIT. An OEE-trained facilitator leads participants through activities such as fidget ladder, trust fall, cable walk, and ropes course. These activities help in teaching students that cooperation, communication, trust, and teamwork play a role in stress management.

Session 7. This session is experiential and simulates a college student's day. Students are forced to decide what to include and what to eliminate from their daily activities. The session concludes with a discussion of the methods students used to complete the task and how approaches to time management may minimize or increase stress.

Session 8. In the last session, students discuss and evaluate the entire program.

Although the program is brief and we have gathered no data to actually confirm that the strategies work or that participants continue any of these activities, it is our impression that the program has positive effects. Because college students are forming adult life-styles, this program may be particularly appropriate for them. The program's varied, action-oriented, and fun activities contribute to its popularity on campus. Other schools could easily adapt this model to their settings.

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