

Mental Health and Well-Being

ECON 73010: Research & Writing Seminar I

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Readings and Assignments

Reading:

- ▶ For today: Barreira, Basilico, and Bolotnyy (2022), Weir (2013), Mueller-Smith and Brown

Assignment:

- ▶ Research proposals (5-10 pages) and research plans (1 page) due April 27

Mental Health

We want you to have a **meaningful and satisfying** life

- ▶ “Meaningful and satisfying” does **not** mean that things will always be easy, that you will always be happy, or that you won’t experience failure or regret

Mental health is an incredibly important input to having a meaningful and satisfying life

Like other aspects of health, you have to work on it

Mental illness can be a serious impediment to a successful career

Prevalence

Mental health issues are very prevalent among graduate students

Barreira, Basilico, Bolotnyy (2022) survey:

- ▶ 18% of econ PhD students currently experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety
 - ▶ Compared to about 5% of total population
 - ▶ This prevalence is comparable to **incarcerated** populations
- ▶ Only about 25% of students experiencing symptoms are receiving help

Many students question what they are doing and periodically think of quitting

Reasons

Loneliness and isolation

Feeling like work isn't useful or important

Feeling that one can't be open with advisors and peers

Not being able to “turn off” from work

Competitiveness

Imposter Syndrome

The **Imposter Syndrome** is **incredibly** common among academics

- ▶ A constant feeling that you “don’t belong”
- ▶ A worry that you are “going to be found out”
- ▶ Unable to internalize and accept your successes
- ▶ Feeling like you’ve gotten to where you are through luck, charity, and sympathy

Reality

You are here because you are intelligent, well-trained, and hard-working

We **want you to succeed**

Graduate school is **not** a competition

If you feel like an imposter, note that many of your peers probably do as well

Further, many of your faculty probably do too

Academic success does not define who you are as a human being

Some Advice

Pick Topics You Enjoy

Graduate students often feel their work doesn't matter

Pick topics you enjoy and find interesting – don't pick topics that you think are hot or will get you the best job

Don't think that your work is going to change the world – it probably won't. Focus on making small contributions

Work Continuously, Not in Chunks

Try to **regularly** work on research and writing

Avoid the temptation to “cram”

Be organized with your work, keep a journal, etc.

Don't Go it Alone

Human beings are social creatures

Work with other students

Work with faculty

Come to the office – don't go into hiding

Reach Out to Peers

If you notice something is off with a peer, reach out to them

Take them to dinner, to coffee, etc.

Ask one another how each is doing

Socialize

It's important to do fun things

Organize group social outings – dinners, ballgames, trips to the beach, etc.

Get drinks after work

Exercise and Sleep

Physical health is very important for mental health

Try to get enough sleep – 7-8 hours

Regularly exercise – exercise is a great anti-depressant

Take Time Off

It's easy to think you should be working seven days a week, 12 hours a day

This is not sustainable

Figure out what works best for you and try to schedule personal time, including in significant blocks (e.g. vacations)

Find A Hobby

It's important to have significant interests outside of work

Pick a hobby – golf, running, cycling

Consider volunteering

Be Honest

Be honest with yourself, your advisors, and your peers

It's okay to talk about how you are feeling and how you are struggling (we all are, to an extent)

Religious Practice

If you are religious, practice it

Make time for prayer and worship

Can be a great source of community

If you are not religious, make time for meditation

Social Media

Be careful with social media

People often make their lives seem extraordinary and extravagant

Avoid the temptation to compare yourself

Seek Help

If you are struggling, **SEEK HELP**

Nothing wrong with seeing a counselor – try it out

Nothing wrong with taking medication if needed – be open to it

Reach out to peers, faculty, and staff (e.g. Birgit) if you are struggling