

## “Tending the Teacher: Self-Care for Dynamic Faculty”

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June is a good month for a teaching conference. We're past commencement, most annual reports and evaluations have been submitted, and summer is just around the corner. Thanks to the Center for Student Success, I was able to attend the Lilly Conference in Bethesda Maryland in June. One of the sessions I attended was titled, 'Tending the Teacher: Self-Care for Dynamic Faculty.' Self-care is a hot topic right now. I'm reminded of the oxygen mask on an airplane rule: put on your own mask before assisting others. As faculty, we tend to reach a state of burnout at various points of the semester (usually near the end) and need to keep the idea of self-care and tending to ourselves at the front of our minds. Whether you're coming from teaching over the summer, or are getting ready to start your new fall semester, thinking about what works best for *you* in terms of self-care is always timely and worth your effort.

Bevin Clare and Camille Freeman of the Maryland University of Integrative Health are no strangers to faculty burnout and treating it head-on with self-care. Using science and evidence-based research, they offer the following pillars of self-care for 'Tending the Teacher':

- Course design can be self-care
- Day-to-day wellness practices
- Food and fuel

**Course design as self-care.** Thinking about course-design as self-care is a unique way of planning out your semester. Ways you can map out your semester to stop (or at least lessen) the burn out are to shift a focus to quality over quantity in student interactions, let your students play together via shared assessments that they create and evaluate, and to allow for maximized peer-to-peer engagement. Suggestions include utilizing the built-in tools provided by your LMS (Blackboard, Canvas, etc.) such as discussion forums, peer-review assignments, and teams. The

LMS can also save you time if you use audio or video functions to communicate with your students. A suggestion for a quick and easy way to incorporate audio and video is [www.vocaroo.com](http://www.vocaroo.com). This simple voice recorder can help you provide feedback and doesn't require an elaborate or in-depth knowledge of technology.

Planning ahead for the future can help you "future proof" yourself. Saving canned responses is a great way to save time if you know you type the same thing to your students over and over again. Another suggestion related to making videos is to make them timeless. Instead of saying "welcome to fall semester 2017", say "welcome to the new semester". It gets the same point across and you can now reuse this content in future semesters. Pacing assignments can be difficult depending on your course content, but if you know you get extremely busy at a certain point in the semester, try to shift one or two larger assignments to a different week if at all possible. Your students may thank you for this as well!

Finally, using your calendar notifications can be a way to consolidate your to-do list into your calendar. If you set up notifications for things you need to get done, this can help you stay on top of your ever-growing list of things. A hot trend is the bullet journal (<http://bulletjournal.com>) which can be translated into a calendar app if you like using one. Since so much of our time is spent in the classroom, prepping for being in the classroom, and responding to what happened in the classroom, ensuring that we practice self-care here can set the stage for the self-care you put in place for the rest of your time.

**Day-to-day wellness practices.** These are the things we do every day that set the tone for our well-being. Without day-to-day wellness practices, we would not be able to incorporate much of the self-care strategies for the classroom. This could be as simple as setting and abiding

by a certain bedtime, or simply taking a 10 minute walk before the start of your office hours.

Clare and Freeman offer some research-based wellness practices to find your rhythm:

1. Work in short bursts: Use the Pomodoro technique for time management, set an alarm clock, use brain.fm or focus@will which are both scientifically developed tools to incorporate music for brain stimulation
2. Analyze your work environment: How's your seat/chair? Is there anything living or green in your space? Do you have visual inspiration?
3. Productivity tools: ToDoIst, EverNote, Freedcamp, Completed list, Momentum
4. Self-reflections or mindfulness: Websites Buddhify or Headspace, consider a gratitude journal, yoga and/or meditation, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)

**Food and fuel.** By now, most of us know that what we eat affects our functioning. As Clare and Freeman are experts in integrative medicine- specifically herbs, the specific ones identified below are well-researched and have been scientifically proven to provide the results expected. A few specific tips for self-care via food from experts in integrative health are as follows:

1. Start your day with breakfast: It is a cliché that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Breakfasts of substance include oatmeal, eggs, fruit, nuts and seeds, and dark leafy greens.
2. Snack with sense: Actually take a snack break! Some healthy, filling snacks include: yogurt with berries, veggie sticks, nuts (especially walnuts), and dark chocolate (in moderation).
3. Awake without caffeine: Know your rhythm (see day-to-day wellness practices above), use movement, Dandyblend (dandelion herbal beverage, [www.dandyblend.com](http://www.dandyblend.com)), other research-based herbal solutions (bacopa monnerii, ginkgo biloba), sleep well at night.

4. Boost your brain with food: walnuts, spicy foods, sour foods, bitters, another research-based herb, tulsi (*ocimum sanctum*).
5. Breathe deeply: oats as food, the herb ashwaganda (*withania somniferum*), lemon balm, and Easy Now tea by Traditional Medicinals.

There are so many other ways to practice self-care and there is no one way to prescribe self-care. It is totally unique to each individual what works best for you. If you don't suffer from burnout, share your secrets with your colleagues that do! If you're looking for more information or help with your burnout and stress, it is an important step to identify your support systems and call on them as necessary. The end result of preventing or at least lessening faculty burnout is hopefully less stressed students, smooth semesters, and rewarding teaching experiences.

#### **References:**

- Clare, B., & Freeman, C. (2017, June 2). *Tending the teacher: Self-care for faculty* [PDF document]. Retrieved from [https://padletuploads.blob.core.windows.net/prod/27219528/c1790b0aa6715042d3c6912c0bb3bcba/Tending\\_the\\_Teacher\\_\\_1\\_.pdf](https://padletuploads.blob.core.windows.net/prod/27219528/c1790b0aa6715042d3c6912c0bb3bcba/Tending_the_Teacher__1_.pdf)
- Clare, B., & Freeman, C. (2017). *Self-care for dynamic faculty*. Retrieved from <https://padlet.com/bevinclare/selfcare>