

# Understanding Student Behaviors: The Invisible Effect of Mental Health

Zornitsa (Zori) Kalibatseva, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of Psychology  
SFT Union Workshop  
Challenges in the Classroom Panel  
August 25, 2016

# Overview

- Presentation (10 minutes)
  - How do we explain student behaviors?
  - Common psychological disorders among college students
  - Symptoms, behaviors, and impairment
  - What can we do as teachers?
  - Resources at Stockton
- Discussion (10 minutes)

If you saw a student do this in your class, how would you explain it?



# Common Psychological Disorders among College Students

- **Anxiety disorders**
  - **Depressive disorders**
  - Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
  - Substance use disorders
  - Post-traumatic stress disorder
  - Eating disorders
- 
- Average age of onset for depression and anxiety is age 18-24

# Symptoms

- Concentration difficulties
- Racing thoughts
- Fatigue/loss of energy
- Sleep disturbances
- Appetite disturbances
- Feeling down, loss of interest
- Excessive worrying
- Muscle tension
- Difficulty organizing
- Feelings of inadequacy
- Feelings of sheer terror

# Impairment

- Memory problems
- Learning challenges
- Attending class
- Staying awake
- Making connections
- Diminished creativity
- Limited flexibility
- Lack of motivation
- Inability to collaborate
- Inability to problem solve

# What Can We Do as Teachers? (1)

- Survey students at the beginning of the class to gather information about their learning challenges (e.g., needs assessment)
- Include a statement about mental health in your syllabus
- Be aware of assumptions you make and think of alternative explanations for student behavior
- Examine your own ideas and possible stigma about mental health
- Check in with students who have missed multiple classes or an exam
- Get to know students and respond to them with flexibility and caring
- When students are in crisis, walk them over to the Counseling Center

# What Can We Do as Teachers? (2)

- Break down major assignments (if possible)
- Assign ungraded in-class assignments that ask students to think through problems
- Cut back on the time you spend lecturing or lecture in small blocks accompanied by other activities (e.g., group work)

# Resources

- The Wellness Center
  - Counseling Services & Alcohol and Drug Education
  - Learning Access Program (LAP)
  - Health Services
  - Women's, Gender and Sexuality Center
- Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities

# Get Your Classes Involved!

- Suicide Prevention Week Events
  - October 2 to October 7
- Disordered Eating Awareness and Prevention Week
  - March (Spring semester)
- Wellness Center Events
- Active Minds Club

# References

- Douce, L. A., & Keeling, R. P. (2014). *A strategic primer on college student mental health*. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Savini, C. (2016). Are you being rigorous or just intolerant? *Chronicle Vitae*, <https://chroniclevitae.com/news/1427-are-you-being-rigorous-or-just-intolerant?cid=VTEVPMSED1>