

BIOLOGY DEI

Diversity | Equity | Inclusion

COVID creates another mental health crisis

By Sarah McMenamin

To be good scientists, we have to internalize our research; how do we do this without risking our self-esteem and well being? Research progress requires an enormous amount of time and mental energy; how can we put forth such time and energy while also maintaining balance in our lives? Academia is a high-pressure environment; how do we calibrate just enough pressure to motivate

our best work, but not so much pressure that mental health suffers? These questions may not have straightforward answers, but it is clear that there is an ongoing mental health crisis in academia. Even before the pandemic, graduate students were six times more likely to be anxious or depressed (Evans et al, 2018) and showed higher rates of psychiatric disorders than the general population (Levecque et al, 2017). Professors also struggled with mental health and widespread burnout (Guthrie et al, 2018). The isolation and anxiety of COVID-19 has created a second, more acute mental health emergency. The number of US adults experiencing anxiety or depression has more than tripled compared to pre-pandemic numbers (CDC). Within academia, the pandemic has decimated many of the supports that helped scientists, and particularly trainees, cope with the stresses of research. Early studies suggest that one in three US graduate students is now suffering from moderate or severe depression or anxiety (Chirikov et al, 2020). While we have all lived through the same pandemic, we each experience our own 'personal pandemic' shaped by the specifics of our unique situations and identities. We can all treat ourselves and one another with grace, dignity and understanding as we emerge and recover from this year. All of us can safeguard our own mental health by striving to maintain good balance in our lives, and having the courage seek support and help when needed. Those of us in mentorship roles remain vigilant for opportunities to support wellbeing. Longer term, we must acknowledge and address academia's ongoing mental health crisis (Loissel, 2019).

May is Mental Health Month

BC Counseling has many services; call 617-552-3310 for same-day consultations

Most therapists accept insurance, and therapy can be quite affordable

Resources and grad student community at PHDBalance

Nature's collection of articles on mental health in STEM

Suggestions for coping with stress from the CDC

National Alliance on Mental Illness has a collection of BIPOC-specific resources

Biology DEI Committee

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Read more: mental illness in academia and during COVID

Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education.

Evans et al. [Nature Biotechnology, 2018](#).

Mental health in academia: A question of support. Loissel. [eLife, 2019](#).

Undergraduate and Graduate students' mental health during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Chirikov et al. [eScholarship 2020](#).

The challenges and mental health issues of academic trainees. Eleftheriades et al. [F1000Res, 2020](#).

Pandemic burnout is rampant in academia. Gewin. [Nature, 2021](#).

COVID's mental-health toll: how scientists are tracking a surge in depression. Abbott. [Nature, 2021](#).

One Year In: COVID-19 and mental health. Gordon. [NIH NIMH, 2021](#).

Connect

Share your ideas and events:
BiologyDEI-ggroup@bc.edu



Twitter: [@bc_bio_dei](#)

Another hateful incident

Another [racist and homophobic vandalism](#) incident happened on our campus at Williams Hall. The person was caught after the person tore down a Black Lives Matter flyer and an LGBTQ+ pride flag. This event happened when the whole country is watching the murder trial of the former police officer Derek Chauvin who killed George Floyd. Meanwhile, another unarmed young black man, [Daunte Wright](#), was killed by police just 10 miles away from Chauvin's trial. We ask that faculty members and everyone in a teaching or mentorship role be aware of the burden that these events create for our BIPOC and LGBTQ students. The chronic, structural racism and homophobia have been an additional difficulty for our community's BIPOC and/or LGBTQ members during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the DEI Committee, we affirm that we are committed to working towards creating an inclusive environment in the Department for all our members. Students, you are not alone and we will not allow racist or homophobic people to make you feel unsafe on this campus.

Sexual misconduct resources

Misconduct and harassment of a sexual nature are utterly unacceptable, particularly in a workplace. For questions and support regarding discrimination, harassment or other issues, please contact Patricia Lowe, BC's Title IX Coordinator (patricia.lowe@bc.edu) or Melinda Stoops, the Deputy Title IX Coordinator for Students (melinda.stoops@bc.edu).

Looking forward

We have exciting plans for the coming months, and here are some things to look forward to over the summer:

- We will be organizing a [Brain, Bias and Being Workshop](#) for the entire Biology Department over the summer.
- We will be hosting a [Mental Well-Being Workshop](#) specifically for trainees within the Biology Department.

Based on your feedback, this will be our last monthly newsletter. After this issue, publication frequency will be reduced to once per semester to allow us more time to plan workshops and other events!

Your productivity does not determine your worth.