

Evidence Based Strategies to Support Student Wellness on Fieldwork

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Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the current mental health challenges among students in higher education.
2. Identify common stressors during fieldwork.
3. Implement strategies to support student and educator wellness in fieldwork settings.

Introduction

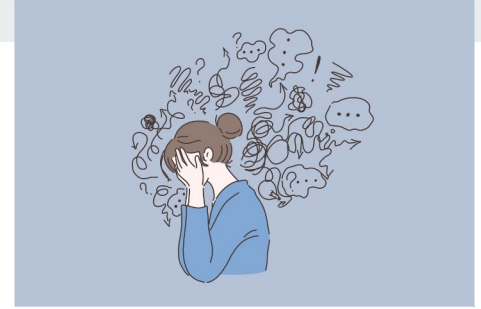
Fieldwork requires a transition from the classroom to the community and role from student to practitioner.

Fieldwork is a formative educational experience.

The consistent novelty of the environment and performance evaluation leads to increased reports of stress.

With increased role demands, there is increased stress, anxiety, and/or depression experienced by educators and students.

Student Stress & Anxiety



- 96% of OT/OTA students have reported having stress directly related to participation in a Level II Fieldwork experience (Thomure, 2023).
- Students in other health professions are reported to experience increased stress during clinical rotations (Compton et al., 2008; Gurková & Zeleníková, 2018; Yildiz Findik et al., 2015).
- Excessive stress can have a negative impact on performance in both academic and clinical settings (Sun et al., 2022).

Contributing Factors: Student and Educator Perspectives

Contributing Factors to Student Stress

- Personal factors (confidence, mental health)
- Challenges managing work/life balance
- High workload or fast pace
- Aspects of the specific fieldwork setting (acute care, hands, etc.)
- Aspects of specific site (site culture, policies, expectations, etc.)
- Shift from classroom learning to full-time fieldwork practice (schedule, expectations, etc.)

Strategies Reported to Manage Stress

- Increased sleep/rest
- Socialization with family/friends
- Engagement in quiet recreation (hobbies, reading, video games, etc.)
- Engagement with peers from academic program
- Engagement in active recreation (exercise, sports, travel, etc.)

Educator Perspectives Related to Common Challenges

Personal Factors

- Workload and time required to supervise
- Role ambiguity - unsure of role demands
- Role strain - difficulty fulfilling role obligations
- Lack of training or insecurities about competency

Student Factors

- Student capabilities - skills and knowledge
- Student characteristics - personal & professional
- Interest and willingness of student

Environmental Factors

- Workload or lack of time to supervise
- Physical space
- Cost of staff downtime
- Potential difficulty with clients/consumers
- Role overload

Proactive Fieldwork Wellness Strategies and Resources

Academic Fieldwork Coordinators



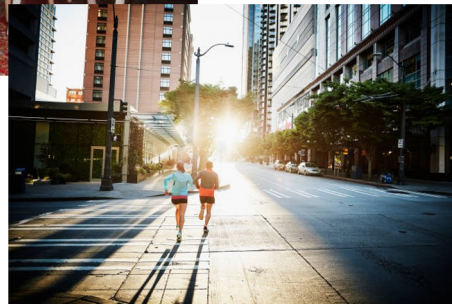
- Connect students to campus health, wellness, and counseling services before fieldwork begins
- Partner with campus disability supports to facilitate accommodations, if necessary
- Identify likely stressors and build an action plan with the student
- Integrate coping, stress management, and wellness strategies at the program level (Smallfield et al., 2022)
- Maintain access through AFWC office hours with in-person and virtual options—create an open door approach
- Provide more frequent check-ins when the placement is out of area (de Witt et al., 2019)

Fieldwork Educators

- Meet with the student prior to fieldwork to discuss expectations that are achievable minimize students' stress
- Organize resources and assignments to prepare and supplement students' learning
- Meet with your student regularly
 - Identify strengths, challenges, progress, & opportunities
- Plan a field trip for student as a learning opportunity (observe a surgery, administration, other practice area, etc.)
- Assign time to work on projects and assignments during downtime
- Take care of your own self-care needs

Students

- Identify possible stressors that you may encounter at your fieldwork and create an action plan
- Utilize academic and clinical resources
 - Meet with your OT advisor and AFWC to discuss concerns about fieldwork
 - During your FW, contact your AFWC to discuss concerns or if you need additional support
- Come prepared for the day
- Communicate with your FWE if any learning/teaching strategies are helpful to you and share constructive feedback
- Create opportunities to practice skills you are not confident with
- Reflect upon your day and what you will do differently moving forward



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