

Dear Campus Community,

This Friday, November 5, 2021, Fontbonne University will cancel classes so that students may observe a wellness day. Across the country and in our own backyard, students are struggling with stress and feeling overwhelmed, in part associated with the demands of academic and social pressures, as well as the weight of navigating an on-going global pandemic. Our students need us to take this immediate action of declaring Friday as a wellness day to demonstrate our support and commitment to their wellbeing for the reasons outlined below. *Please note that while most classes will not meet on Friday, students with external practicums or internships will have to continue to meet their requirements. Students with practicums or internships should check with their faculty for more information.*

At a recent student town hall meeting, the topic of mental health and student support was addressed by the Fontbonne Student Government (FSG). Having carefully surveyed a wide cross section of students from various class years and academic programs, FSG shared that student stress levels are “through the roof.” Factors contributing to student stress include feeling overloaded with assignments, not wanting to burden anyone with their problems when others are also struggling, managing multiple commitments during a semester where the “fast forward” button was pushed, and for first-year students in particular, the transition from finishing high school on-line to starting their collegiate careers fully in-person has been especially jarring.

Additionally, use of our campus counseling center and students of concern referrals are significantly higher this fall as compared to previous years. At the Mental Health Fair held on campus earlier this fall, over 100 students came out to learn about on- and off-campus resources and watched a documentary about college student suicide. The discussion following the film illustrated just how hungry students are for support and recognition of their struggles. And Fontbonne is not alone; these trends are appearing on campuses throughout our region and beyond, including some local colleges that have faced the tragedy of multiple student suicides this semester alone.

Students are encouraged to use the day off from classes on Friday to rest, check in with each other, and attend to their overall mental health and wellness in whatever ways are most helpful to them. The information below provides ideas on ways that student wellness may be prioritized on Friday and beyond:

#### Intellectual Self-Care:

- Read a book or listen to a podcast
- Solve a puzzle
- Watch a documentary
- Play a game like chess, checkers, or sudoku

#### Mental/Physical Well-Being:

- Say "no" to things
- Practice health coping such as journaling to identify how you're feeling
- Get outside or be active however you can
- Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals
- Avoid alcohol and other drugs

#### Spiritual Wellness:

- Set aside time for quiet introspection; listen to music that soothes you
- Look into meditation practices, either guided or independently
- Consider touching base with a friend or confidante; conversations with people you love and who love you can do you a world of good
- Set loving and gentle intentions for yourself, perhaps a mantra or a centering word to focus on throughout your day

#### Social Connections:

- Make a list of people you care about and reach out. Don't wait for others to initiate contact
- Spend quality time with loved ones

- Send 'kind notes' to friends and family via text or, better yet, a handwritten note
- Find time to unwind with friends: binge watch your favorite tv show, grab a coffee or quick meal, or go do something active

Academic Wellness:

- Take time to plan out the rest of your semester so you can stay on top of assignments and exams
- Work on tasks in small increments
- Find a study buddy that will help make the workload feel more manageable and less stressful
- Take advantage of campus resources

Finally, for students that would like to connect with a mental health counselor on Friday, our Counseling and Wellness Office will be open for drop-in hours between 1-4:30 pm in Ryan Hall 103. Students may also schedule an appointment by contacting Therese Jacques, Director, at [314-889-1434](tel:314-889-1434) or [tjacques@fontbonne.edu](mailto:tjacques@fontbonne.edu).

Thank you to all members of our campus community for supporting our students during what has truly been an unprecedented time. The Leadership Team and I appreciate the gifts you give each day in sharing your passions, time and energy to keep campus moving forward even through difficult times.

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