



# Developing Coping and Resilience Skills to Advance Student Success

How to Promote Resilience in the First Year



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Student Affairs Forum



## Developing Coping and Resilience Skills to Advance Student Success

As counseling centers and related services struggle to keep pace with the escalating number of students seeking support, student affairs leaders are seeking ways to proactively address student needs. EAB recommends institutions use **scalable, targeted interventions to get ahead of students' mental health concerns** and help at-risk students build the skills necessary to succeed on campus.

## Upcoming Webconferences on This Research

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[Partnering with Faculty on Well-Being Initiatives](#)

*August 15, 1:00-1:30pm ET*

[Targeting Resilience at High-Stress Moments](#)

*September 5, 1:00-1:30pm ET*

## On-Demand Webconferences Related to This Research

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[Why Institutions Are Investing in Coping and Resilience Skills](#)

[Connecting Low-Risk Students to Meaningful Mental Health Resources on Campus](#)

Visit [EAB's Mental Health Services Resource Center](#) for additional insights, tools, and resources.



# Grit, Coping, and Resilience in the Headlines

## No Shortage of Articles Highlighting Skill Gap Among Current Students



*The Coddling of the American Mind*



*Top Students, Too, Aren't Always Ready for College*



*Students Should Be Taught Resilience, but Educators Struggle With the Best Way Forward*



*Succeeding in the Global Economy: The Skill Employers Really Want From New Recruits*



*Homework Therapists' Job: Help Solve Math Problems, and Emotional Ones*



*Declining Student Resilience: A Serious Problem for Colleges*

## Students Struggle to Cope With Day-to-Day Challenges



Students struggle to prioritize their work with a **lack of parental oversight**



Students **clash with new roommates** who they do not know



High-achieving students struggle to persevere after they **fail a test**



Students **blame their professors** when they struggle to learn content

Source: Cross Country Checkup. "Student Should Be Taught Resilience, But Educators Struggle with the Best Way Forward." *CBC Radio*, February 9, 2018; Gray, Peter. "Declining Student Resilience: A Serious Problem for Colleges," *Psychology Today*, September 22, 2015; Lukianoff, Greg And Jonathan Haidt. "The Coddling of the American Mind." *The Atlantic*, September, 2015; Petroff, Alanna. "The Skill Employers Really Want From New Recruits," *CNN Money*, September 23, 2016; Spencer, Kyle. "Homework Therapists' Job: Help Solve Math Problems, and Emotional Ones," *The New York Times*, April 4, 2018; Tuttle Hansen, Elaine. "Top Students, Too, Aren't Always Ready for College," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 11, 2013, EAB interviews and analysis.



# Defining Our Terms

## A Variety of Concepts That Address These Issues

**Grit:** Passion and sustained persistence applied toward long-term achievement, with no particular concern for rewards or recognition along the way

**Resilience:** Ability to face, overcome, and be strengthened by life's adversities and challenges

**Growth Mindset:** Belief that basic talents can be developed through dedication and hard work – brains and talent are just the starting point

**Positive Education:** Educational strategy that blends academic learning with an emphasis on wellbeing

“

### Same Problem, Different Names

“Today’s students are bright, eager, academically ready, and take direction well. They have lots of good qualities but don’t have the fundamental skills to take agency in their lives. **Call it a lack of coping, resilience, grit, or positive education... they lack the necessary skills to succeed.**”

*Vice President of Student Affairs  
Public Research University*

”

Source: Duckworth, Angela. *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. New York: Scribner, 2016; Dweck, Carol. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Random House, 2006; Newman, Tony. *What Works in Building Resilience?* London: Barnardo's, 2004; Seligman, Martin, et al. "Positive Education: Positive Psychology and Classroom Interventions." *Oxford Review of Education* 35:3 (2009): 293-311; EAB interviews and analysis.

# Examining the Root Cause

## Two Prominent Theories About Why Students Lack Coping and Resilience Skills



### Today's Students Are 'Soft'

- "Helicopter" parents contribute to **lack of independence**
- Parents are reluctant to see their children struggle and step in to **shield them from consequences**
- Students **lack experiences and coping skills** that help them to bounce back from challenges
- Failure-averse students **shut down** when they do not succeed



### Today's Students Face More Challenges

- Student **feel uncertain about the future** in a charged and tumultuous political climate
- High cost of college and the **burden of student debt** adds to students' stress and anxiety
- **Social pressures and FOMO** present 24/7 through social media
- **Competitive job** market magnifies student anxiety

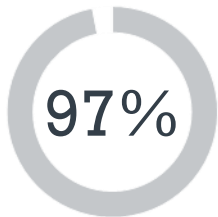




# A Top-of-Mind Issue for EAB Members

## A Growing Appetite for Preventive Support

### Grit and Resilience Hot Topics Across Student Affairs



Of Student Affairs Forum members rated Growing Grit and Resilience as an **important priority**

#### Selected Presentations from NASPA and ACPA Conferences

- ✓ *Getting Gritty: Teaching Students to Embrace Failure as a Key to Growth*
- ✓ *Reframing Resilience / Failing Brilliantly*
- ✓ *A Question of Resilience*
- ✓ *No Time For That?: Developing Career Resilience in Nontraditional Students*

“

There's an idea that there is something wrong with students today. But that's because people are failing to recognize the normal challenges of jumping into difficult work (leaving home). These changes highlight where the gaps are between people's current skills and their aspirations. **There's not something wrong with the students and there is not something wrong with the college – that's exactly what we're here to do.**

*Abigail Lipson  
Director of the Success-Failure Project  
Harvard University*

”



# “Every Year is Record Breaking”

## Students’ Appetite for Mental Health Support Continues to Grow

### Counseling Center Demand Shows No Sign of Slowing



7x

Rate at which demand for counseling center appointments **outpaced enrollment growth**



12 days

Median wait time for individual therapy appointments on campuses that use a waitlist

### Low-Risk Students Contribute to Growing Demand

*Who are low-risk students?*

- ✓ **Not at risk of hurting or harming themselves or others**
- ✓ Developmental challenges
- ✓ General anxiety or stress exacerbated by the academic or political environment
- ✓ Loneliness or social isolation

“Demand for mental health support is rapidly growing ... In response, we have poured more and more resources into clinical support services. **Despite the additional investment, both waiting times and student distress are increasing.**”

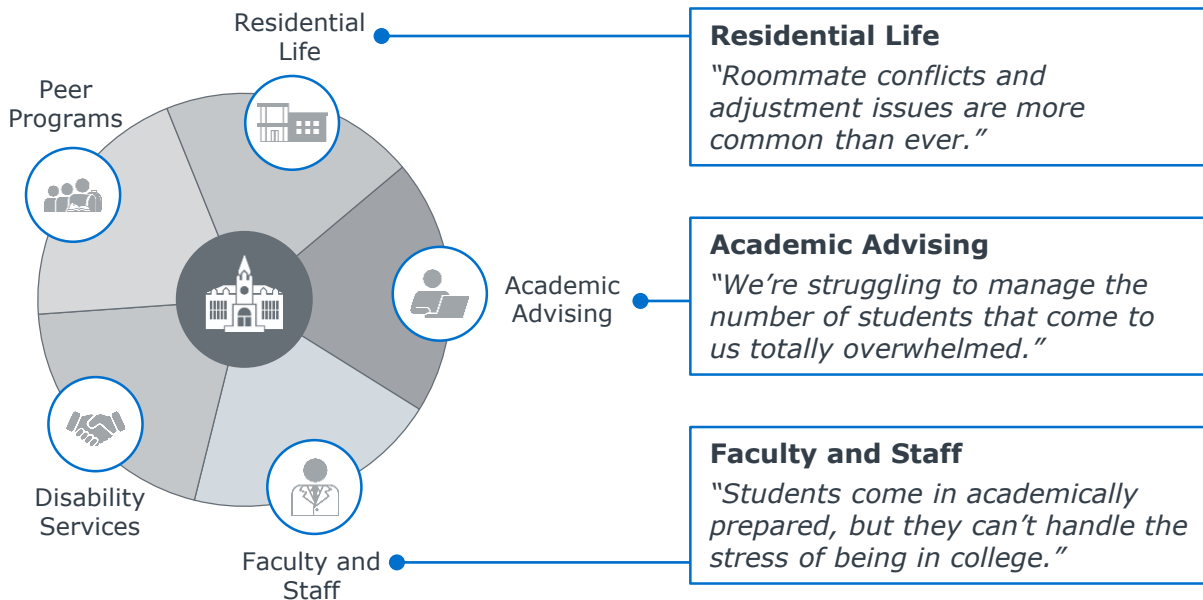
*Vice-Provost and Dean of Students  
University of Alberta*



# Demand Not Just Limited to Counseling

Increasingly Students Look for Help Earlier and In a Variety of Places

## Demand Spills Over to Other Areas on Campus







# Early Intervention is Key

## Addressing Low-Acuity Concerns Lowers Risk of Escalation

### Suicide Increasingly Threatens Young People

**#2** Suicide is the **number two leading cause of death** for 15-24 year olds, 2016

**1.8x** Increase in suicide rate for females between 15-24, 2000-2016

**13%** Of undergraduate students **seriously considered suicide in the last 12 months, 2018**



There's a misconception that investing in resiliency and coping skills is catering to today's "snowflake" students – but **this really is step one in solving a much more serious epidemic.**

*Vice President for Student Affairs, Public College*



Suicide Rising Across the US  
*More than a Mental Health Concern*

### CDC Recommendations Give Clear Guidance to Colleges and Universities

Ensuring the government, healthcare, education, the media, and community organizations are working together is important for preventing suicide.

#### What Can Be Done?

Teach coping and problem-solving skills to help people manage challenges

*Identify and support people at risk of suicide*

*Connect people at risk to effective and coordinated mental and physical health care*

# “Helping Our Students Thrive”

## Retention and Student Success Impacts Abound

10%

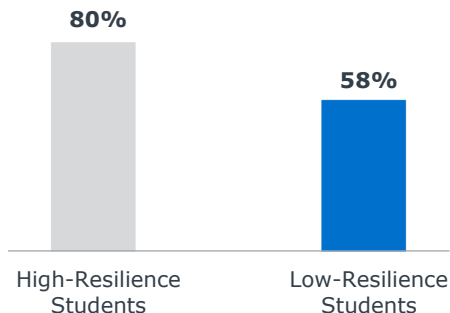
Of low-resilience first-year students persevere through academic challenges<sup>1</sup>

0.90

Difference between low resilience and high resilience first-year students' average GPAs<sup>2</sup>

### First- to Second-Year Retention

By Resilience Level, 2014-15



“

I believe this impacts retention - **students who are better able to manage their anxiety are more likely to continue.** We became concerned when students indicated they were leaving because of anxiety or performance issues in the classroom.

*Susan Lantz, Vice President for Student Life  
Susquehanna University*

”

1) Compared to 75% of high-resilience first-year students  
2) 3.10 for high-resilience first-year students and 2.20 for low-resilience first-year students  
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# The Shifting Enrollment Landscape

## Resilience and Well-Being Initiatives Can Be a Competitive Advantage

### Increasingly Volatile Enrollment Conditions...

36

States will see slower growth or declines in the high school graduation rate

64%

Of colleges did not meet new student enrollment targets in 2017

CHRONICLE SPECIAL REPORT

#### **"Marketing to Survive"**

*Colleges Hone Their Search for a Competitive Advantage*

#### **"A Population in Flux Forces Colleges to Adapt"**

*Colleges are trying an array of strategies in response to changes*

### **A New Competitive Advantage**

It's more and more common to hear parents and families asking about the availability of mental health and well-being resources on campus during the admissions process. **This creates a lot of pressure to make sure we're prepared to answer those questions** and provide support that will be compelling to students and their parents."

*Dean of Students  
Private College*

Source: Hoover, Eric and Beckie Supiano. "A Population in Flux Forces Colleges to Adapt." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 6, 2016; Hoover, Eric. "Marketing to Survive." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 29, 2016; Selingo J. The Future of Enrollment, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2017. Jaschik, Scott. "The 2017 Survey of Admissions Directors: Pressure All Around," *Inside Higher Ed*, September 13, 2017; and EAB interviews and analysis.

# Where Do We Go From Here?

## Key Next Steps for Student Affairs Leaders

“

### Maximize Current Efforts

“One of the things we realized quickly was we can’t solely deliver one-on-one support on this size of a campus. **We needed to figure out a way to scale up support for the masses and maximize our efforts.**”

*Jody Donovan  
Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs  
and Dean of Students  
Colorado State University*

”

“

### Strategically Expand Efforts

“We are lucky to have strong support from our leadership for addressing coping and resilience skills. **Our biggest challenge is figuring out what to invest in.** We have to make sure whatever we commit to is responsive to student needs, speaks to their interest, and benefits them in a meaningful way.”

*K.C. Mmeje  
Vice President of Student Affairs  
Southern Methodist University*

”

# Study Roadmap

## Developing Coping and Resilience Skills to Advance Student Success

### Implementing and Refining Resilience Initiatives



### Building a Campus-Wide Network



1

Prime Students  
Early in the **First  
Year**



2

**Target  
Interventions**  
Beyond the First  
Year



3

Leverage **Campus  
Partners** to Scale  
Reach



4

Coda: Charting  
a Path to an  
**Institutional  
Framework**



# Overwhelmed, Stressed, and Anxious

## Students Encounter Difficulties Adjusting to College



### First-Year Students Face Significant Challenges Right Away...

“Some students lack strategies to deal with small challenges, like disappointment and failure. We notice an increasing number coming to campus with that lack of skills and relying on ideation of hurting themselves as a way to cope. **Early interventions are critical to ensure they do not act on those urges.**”

*David Spano*

*Associate Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs  
University of North Carolina Charlotte*

### ...And They Can Escalate Quickly

# 50%

Of first-year students report feeling **stressed** most or all of the time

# 35%

Of incoming first-year students frequently feel **anxious**

# 48%

Of students **present at the counseling center for anxiety**, 18 percentage points higher than for depression

Source: LeViness, Peter, Carolyn Bershad, and Kim Gorman. "Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors Annual Survey," 2018; Denizet-Lewis, Beniot. 2017. "[Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety?](#)", *New York Times*, 2017; Eagan, M. K., Stolzenberg, E. B., Zimmerman, H. B., Aragon, M. C., Whang Sayson, H., & Rios-Aguilar, C. (2017). *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2016*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA; Jed Foundation. [Students Who Feel Emotionally Unprepared for College More Likely to Report Poor Academic Performance and Negative College Experience](#). 2015; EAB interviews and analysis.

# Everyone Faces Challenges in the First Year...

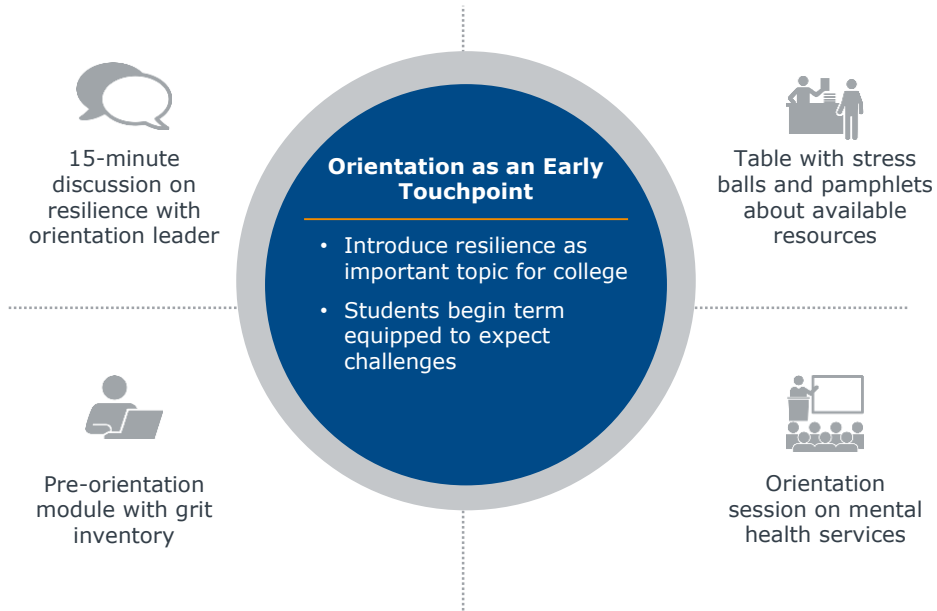


...But Resilience Impacts Student Behaviors and Outcomes

Common Roadblock	<i>"I miss my family and haven't made good friends."</i>	<i>"I failed my first test in a required class."</i>
<b>Student With Low Resilience/Coping Skills</b>	<p><b>Behavior</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stays in room, increases time on social media</li> <li>• Worries that he doesn't belong at this institution</li> <li>• Goes home on the weekends</li> </ul> <p><b>Outcome</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not return for second term</li> <li>• Lost tuition dollars</li> </ul>	<p><b>Behavior</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stops going to class</li> <li>• Worries that she doesn't belong at this institution</li> <li>• Becomes anxious about her other classes</li> </ul> <p><b>Outcome</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fails class and is placed on academic probation</li> <li>• GPA jeopardizes scholarship and planned major</li> </ul>
<b>Student with High Resilience/Coping Skills</b>	<p><b>Behavior</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talks with RA about ways to get involved</li> <li>• Joins campus group for improv</li> </ul> <p><b>Outcome</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Makes friends through improv group</li> <li>• Returns for second term</li> </ul>	<p><b>Behavior</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits TA during office hours</li> <li>• Joins study group and realizes others are also struggling</li> <li>• Takes advantage of tutor offered through campus academic support office</li> </ul> <p><b>Outcome</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student passes course</li> <li>• Keeps GPA at 3.0 needed for entry to planned major</li> </ul>

# Colleges Integrating Resilience at Orientation

A Range of Supports to Prime Students Before Classes Begin





# The First Year is Critical for Resilience Initiatives



Yet Current Efforts Often Miss the Mark in Timing, Depth, and Reach

## Common Pitfalls



### Content Overload

"Students are inundated with information at orientation and during the first weeks of classes...we can't compete."



### Opt-in Required

"We offer resilience training through the counseling center, but it's hard to get students to attend."



### Single Dose Lessons Don't Stick

"We recognize that our 45-minute workshop is not enough to teach students everything they need to be successful."



### Doesn't Resonate

"Our students were all high performers in high school. They don't think they will be the one to fail or struggle, so they don't care until it's too late."

# Thinking Beyond Orientation

## Susquehanna University Built Resilience Into Their Common Read Program

### Use Input From Students, Faculty, and Staff...



Student committee generates list of topics



Faculty and staff vote on theme and nominate articles to include on reading list

### ...To Develop a Resilience-Themed Reading List

Anthology of 10-15 articles, ranging from excerpts of books on business to war memoirs, including:

- "On Campus, Failure is on the Syllabus"  
*Jessica Bennett*
- Excerpt from *Option B*  
*Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant*
- "Black Men Emerging"  
*Derrick R. Brooms*

### Theme and Skills Infused Across the First Semester

#### Summer Essay Assignment

Students write reflective essay on common reading for first year seminar

#### Preview Days Seminar

Upperclassmen lead sessions on the common reading theme and essay assignment

#### First Year Seminar Discussions

Course curriculum focused on common reading topic

#### Campus-Wide Lecture Series

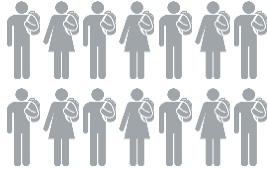
Lectures on common reading reinforce concepts and keep them top of mind



# A Variety of Touchpoints and Messages

## CSU Long Beach's College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics

### Broad-Based Strategies



Peer-led "Safari to Success" breakout **orientation session** focuses on growth mindset

**Syllabus statements** encourage student help-seeking

**First-year seminar** integrates growth mindset into curriculum

### Targeted Strategies



Academic **advisors check in** with first year students who failed midterms to connect with resources

**Peer mentors** trained to use growth mindset language and recognize academic warning signs

## CSU Long Beach's Approach: By the Numbers

400+

First year students complete the **seminar** each year

150+

First and second year students per term receive **peer mentors**

180

First year students attend Safari to Success **orientation program**

# CSULB's Multipronged Effort Extends Reach

## Resilience Initiatives Engage Students and Staff

“You need to create an environment that includes growth mindset messaging in different contexts across students’ careers... Ours is a **multipronged effort that tries to push different buttons**—students, advising, faculty.”

*Krzysztof Slowinski, Associate Dean  
California State University Long Beach*

### Keys to Success



#### Timely

Multiple efforts across the first year reaches students when they need support



#### Departmentally Supported

Staff, faculty, and upperclassmen engage first year students







#### Proactive

Advising team identifies at risk students after mid-terms and intervenes

### Making It Work on Your Campus



-  Do departments provide guidance or templates for course syllabi? Could a statement about wellness be incorporated?
-  What are other ways to promote statements supporting student wellness?
-  Does your institution have a first-year seminar course that could incorporate resilience concepts?
-  Does your campus use peer mentors? Could growth mindset language be added to their training?

# Staying Top of Mind

## Programming Insufficient to Maintain Mindshare

### Programming is a Great Place to Start...



Introduces resilience as an important concept for college students



Aims to reach students before they encounter major challenges in college



Casts a wide net



Leverages existing channels (e.g., orientation, first-year seminar, common reading programs)

### ...But Students Have a Lot on Their Minds



*Volunteer at 5K fun run this weekend*



*Two papers due next week*



*Intramural softball practice three nights this week*



*Extra shift at work-study job*



*Residence hall group outing to get frozen yogurt on Friday*



*Remember to call my family*

# The Power of Nudges

## Facilitating Positive Student Behaviors

### What is a Nudge?

A nudge is “any small feature of the environment that attracts people’s attention and alters their behavior but does so in a way that doesn’t compel.”

### Key Elements

1 Make It Easy

2 Make It Attractive

3 Make It Social

4 Make It Timely

### How To Nudge Resilience Habits



Online portals related to student mental health and resilience use campus single sign-on



Quiz assesses student’s mindset and recommends resources based on answers



Social media campaign encouraging resilience uses a widely promoted hashtag



Resilience reminders sent around midterms and finals

# Focusing on Known Pain Points

## Western University's Calendar-Based Well-Being Messaging Strategy

### Central Working Group Drives Content Strategy

- 1 Working group includes communications staff from units across campus
- 2 Group meets monthly to identify ongoing and upcoming student challenges
- 3 Group collaborates on a core calendar that unifies messaging and resource promotion strategy



### Content Considerations

- ✓ *What academic deadlines loom this month?*
- ✓ *Are certain populations facing unique challenges?*
- ✓ *Are there external issues causing stress?*

**Exam week** amplifies student stress. Encourage students to take a study break and attend a mindfulness session in the student union.

Students may **miss their families** around the holidays. Remind students about community-building exercises on campus.

# Grit Bits for Success

## DTCC Gives Students Opt-In Tool for Encouragement

### How It Works



Grit Bits advertised centrally on DTCC student portal, in mandatory first-year student success course, and in presentations to groups on campus



Students sign up to receive Grit Bits, either via text message or on social media



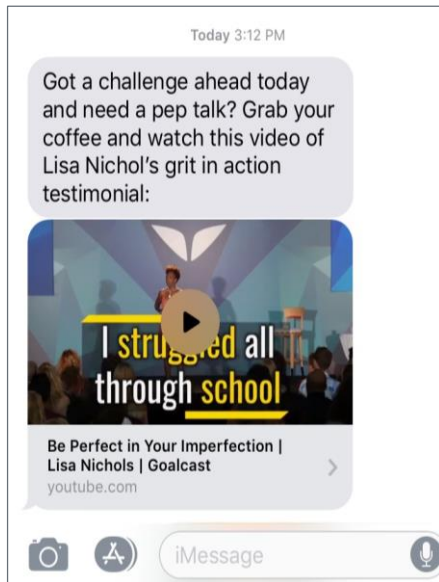
Students receive brief messages that keep resilience top of mind or promote resources



We bring this to students and say, “We know that sometimes life gets hard. Would you like these **inspirational reminders from someone who knows you can do it?**”

*Jennifer Blackwell, Academic Advisor  
Delaware Technical Community College*

### Sample Post





# In-the-Moment Support with YOU@CSU Platform



## YOU@CSU Promotes Personalized Resources

- 1 Mobile-ready platform accessible through **university app or main student portal**
- 2 Platform uses single-sign on for **seamless access**
- 3 "Reality Check" quizzes **assess current state of well-being** in the areas of Succeed, Thrive, and Matter
- 4 Content tailored to each student's **unique needs**

3 Reality Check Goals YOU | Colorado State University Crisis 2

Home Succeed v Thrive v Matter v Search

4

**Career Center**  
The Career Center is for students to explore different majors, find jobs whether on campus or out of college, and help on creating resumes and nail...

**Learning to Juggle**  
After your tireless hunt for the ideal job is over, it's likely that you'll dive into your work forgetting to come up for air. Whether that's in regar...

**Anxiety**  
Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health disorders for college students. Experiencing anxiety can be one of the most disabling feelings in the world. It's good to identify what causes anxie...

Graduation Countdown  
844 Days : 9 Hours : 53 Mins : 55 Secs

Most Viewed Content  
Current Events, Tips, & Advice

- Clubs & Organizations  
At CSU, there are over 500 ways to get involved - and counting. Capitalize ...
- "Wrong About Addiction"  
Human beings and our innate inclination to form bonds go beyond hobbies and...
- Connecting with Alumni  
The Ram Network is a group of volunteers committed to fostering relationships...
- Ongoing Health Issues  
If you or someone you know has a chronic physical condition and/or mental h...
- Wanna Quit?  
The CSU Health Network can help you with the quitting process, when you are...

56,000

Unique visitors since  
2016 launch

20,000+

Completed reality  
check quizzes

3:30

Average time (minutes)  
spent on site per visit

# High Utilization and Impact

## Self-Directed Approach Proves Successful at Colorado State University

### App Promotes Campus Resources and Helps Students Manage Stress<sup>1</sup>



**92%**

Learned something new about their physical and mental well-being



**87%**

Increased their awareness of campus resources



**76%**

Reported that YOU@CSU helped them manage stress

### Vendor Platform Logistics

*Grit Digital Health*



**\$0.75-2.00**

Average cost per student



**\$5k-10k**

One-time customization fee<sup>2</sup>



**~20**

University partners

1) N=350

2) Cost depends on size of institution and degree of customization.

# Partnering with Colleges for Microtargeting

## A Profile of Tech Vendor Motimatic

### What is *Motimatic* ?



Uses online advertising to deliver custom messages in students' feeds across platforms



Library of 5,000 messages to promote resilience, persistence, and encourage positive actions



Students subscribed to themed channels based on data provided by institution

### Sample Student Profile



**Alexis**

Age: 19  
 Level: **Undergraduate**  
 Study: **Journalism**

Channels:  
**Undergraduate Degree**  
**Educate to Elevate**  
**University Channel**  
**At Risk**



Students see **8-12 ads per day** across social media channels



Retention rate for students who received Motimatic messages was **3.9 percentage points higher** than control group<sup>1,2</sup>



Campus partners pay **\$12** per month per student

1) N=3,317.  
 2) This result is statistically significant at  $p=.003$ .  
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# Making the Most of the First Year

## Takeaways for Student Affairs Leaders



### Discussion Questions

- 1 | How can orientation programs highlight resilience and belonging?
- 2 | What existing first year programs target students' mindset and resilience?
- 3 | What themes can we focus on to improve student mindset in our common reading program?
- 4 | How can we use technology to keep resilience top of mind for students?



### Recommended Next Steps

#### Short Term

- Integrate resilience and mindset into orientation programming
- Synchronize with existing efforts on campus (counseling, residence life)
- Explore tech options that nudge students to self-help (texts, Instagram)

#### Long Term

- Develop a cross-branded campus-wide initiative around building resilience
- Consider an app or web-based platform to develop students' self-help habits

# Forthcoming Resources

## Student Mental Health and Well-Being



### **White Paper**

Expanding Well-Being Initiatives Through Faculty Partnerships



### **Case Study**

Reimagining Intake: Centralize Mental Health and Well-Being Intake



### **Case Study**

Embedding Resilience into the Career Process



### **Expert Insight**

Integrating Resilience Skills into Support for Readmitted Students



### **Best Practice Study**

Meeting the Escalating Demand for Mental Health Services



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