Mitigating Stress:
What Neuroscience Teaches Us About Virtual Work and Collaboration

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The Basics
Mitigating Stress

Range of Activities in a Day That Our Campus and Facilities Should Support
Space Should Make You Move

The human brain evolved under conditions of almost constant motion. The best meeting would have everyone walking at about 1.8 miles per hour.

Dr. John Medina
Professor of Bioengineering, University of Washington
Planning for Campus-Walkability
Space Should Connect to Nature

Nature is not merely “nice,” it is a vital ingredient in healthy human functioning. In fact, viewing natural landscapes tends to promote faster and more complete restoration from stress than viewing unblighted environments lacking nature.

Kahn - 2006
Kaplan - 1992
Kellert & Wilson - 1993
Green foliage
Water events

These elements, especially in combination, boost specific components of executive function in adolescents.
Creativity
Space Should Pique Curiosity

People don’t pay attention to boring things. (N)ovel stimuli – the unusual, unpredictable, or distinctive – is a powerful way to harness attention in service of interest.

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Professor of Bioengineering, University of Washington
Mitigating Stress

COVID Disruption

- Spontaneous Collaboration
- Social Interaction
- Life at Home
- Work / Life Balance
- Shared Mobility & Transit
- Peer-to-Peer Learning & Interaction
- Equality and Access
Mitigating Stress

Human Evolution Timeline

- 2.6 Million Years Ago
- 1.6 Million Years Ago
- 800,000 Years Ago
- 200,000 Years Ago
- 40,000 Years Ago
- Present
Mitigating Stress

Human Evolution Timeline

- 2.6 Million Years Ago
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Last 600 Years
Mitigating Stress

Technological Evolution Timeline

1400 AD
1600
1750
1850
1950
2050

Human Evolution Timeline

Printing Press
Telescope
Steam Engine
Telegraph
Light Bulb
Telephone
Car
Word Processor
Autonomous Vehicles
Facebook
Google
DVDs
Cell Phones
Internet
Windows
Man on the Moon

1400 AD
1600
1750
1850
1950
2050
Mitigating Stress

Technological Evolution Timeline

1400 AD  1600  1750  1850  1950  2050
Mitigating Stress

Higher Ed Opportunity

COVID-19

- Acceptance of Online Learning Modality
- Acceptance of Work From Home
- Reduction of Private Faculty Offices
- Leveraging Outdoor Spaces
- Technology Acceleration
Mitigating Stress

Holistic Higher Ed Environments

- Technology Acceleration
- Acceptance of Online Learning Modality
- Leveraging Outdoor Spaces
- Acceptance of Work From Home
- Reduction of Private Faculty Offices

COVID-19
A New Rhythm of Life
When, How, and Where Learning Happens
The Pandemic Forces Us to Reconsider All Three Influences at Once

Mitigating Stress
Stress on the Frontline
Grant “permission,”
create an owner’s manual that reinforces healthy behaviors
Affect Labeling Areas

Research shows affect labeling — putting feelings into words — lowers emotional reactivity and disrupts the brain’s flight-or-fight response. It is critical to provide space for students/campus users to express their feelings in constructive ways.

**good**
Provide affect labeling and/or training to promote a positive mindset. Educate staff on the benefits of “owning” stress by identifying the source.

**better**
Encourage sharing among staff. This might look like an interactive wall for communal affect labeling and gratitude.

**best**
Set up a “safe room” dedicated to affect labeling. Provide a sense of safety and privacy. Furnishings should be soft and casual.
Staying Human
Define what “human” means...
and don’t forget to be humane.
Mitigating Stress

Scale & Time
Community Through Communication

Human?

Agency behavior
motivation
meaning
organic & unpredictable

Don't just react, respond

Remote vs. on-site
Shifts
Virtual conference rules
Work modes
Communication manual
Location