



University
of Phoenix®

Strengthening Scholarship Through Qualitative Research: Faculty Stress Management in Asynchronous Learning Environments

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Faculty Stress



Introduction

University of Phoenix faculty:

- Barb Kennedy, LCSW
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Research Topic - Why Important

- Asynchronous learning environment complicated by challenges of organizational and technology changes, class management, perceptions of isolation, engaging nontraditional students, and classroom performance review.

Research Topic - Why Important

- COVID-19 necessitated rapid transition to synchronous online teaching and accentuated faculty stressors including work/life balance, proficiency with technology, curriculum development, perceptions of loneliness, and performance review.

Research Topic - Why Important

- Transition to online education is "raising inequality among students on one hand and stresses amongst faculty on the other" (Zeeshan, Chaudhry, & Khan, 2020, p. 383), with "techno-stress" creating "psychosocial distress" and adversely affecting faculty mental health (Zeeshan, Chaudry, & Khan, 2020, p. 385).

Research Topic - Why Important

- Online faculty report isolation, exhaustion, depersonalization, and low sense of personal accomplishment.
- Consequences include stress, burnout, loss of experienced faculty, costs associated with recruiting replacement faculty, negative impact on students' learning experience, and reduced student persistence, retention, and completion.

Research Topic – Why Important

- The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to identify stress management techniques used by online faculty to mitigate stressors associated with teaching in the asynchronous online learning environment.

Research Topic - Why Important

- Findings may help faculty and academic leadership optimize stress appraisal and develop effective interventions.
- Beneficiaries include faculty, students, parents, counselors, school and university administrators, economists, and public policy thought leaders.

Research Topic - Why Important

- Effective instruction of online courses requires faculty to be well-organized, provide timely feedback, engage students with course-related resources, communicate with students, and maintain an active presence in the online classroom.

Background/Literature Review

Faculty coping mechanisms include:

- Talking with others
- Set goals
- Physical/recreational activities
- Support groups
- Mental health counselors
- Self-destructive behaviors, such as increased alcohol and other substance use

(National Institute of Mental Health, 2020)

Background/Literature Review

Faculty adaptive mechanisms include:

- Self-awareness
- Self-reflection
- Project management

Results of this study may contribute to:

- Increased faculty retention
- Improved student performance
- Increased student retention
- More effective faculty workshops

(Bailey & Card, 2009; McCann & Holt, 2009; McLean, 2006)

Background/Literature Review

COVID-19 related stress associated with synchronous teaching:

- Online questionnaire completed by 313 professors from 14 academic colleges in Israel at the end of the first week of online synchronous teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was assumed to be the most burdened and stressful week of the transition.
- Results revealed higher levels of psychological stress but not vocal symptoms during transition to online synchronous teaching compared with previous periods of teaching.

(Besser, Lotem, & Zeigler-Hill, 2020).

Background/Literature Review

COVID-19 related stress associated with synchronous teaching:

- Visualizing teaching effectiveness as a choreographed “dance” performed on the stage of the online classroom (i.e., online platform) exemplifies existing best practices for online education including:
 - Presence
 - Interaction
 - Respect
 - Encouragement
 - Timely interaction

(Sen, 2020, p. 108)



Background/Literature Review

COVID-19 related stress associated with synchronous teaching:

- Equity in action:
 - Don't assume students have access to devices or adequate internet access (especially in emergency situations).
 - When making technology decisions, consider whether the tool will ease disruption, or create unnecessary stress for you or your students.

(O'Keefe et al., 2020, p. 37)

Background/Literature Review

COVID-19 related stress associated with synchronous teaching:

- Finding internet connections
- Relationships matter:
 - Facebook: “Online Learning Collective for those in global higher education to work together to solve problems”
 - Website: <https://sites.google.com/view/online-learning-collective/home>
 - YouTube:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKc4pkaciqqzrwp9-u_buFA

(Kelehear, 2020)

Phase 1 Methodology

What We Did

- Quantitative correlational case study to examine coping strategies used by online faculty to decrease their stress load.
- Independent variables
 - Maintaining proficiency with organizational and technology changes;
 - Class management;
 - Isolation;
 - Classroom performance review.

Phase 1 Methodology

What We Did

- Dependent variables
 - Adaptive mechanisms commonly used to manage stressors.
- Data collected through online survey distributed through email or web-based venue.

Phase 1 Methodology With Whom

Interdisciplinary undergraduate and graduate
online faculty

Phase 1 Methodology

Where

Online university in southwestern United States

Phase 1 Methodology

What Happened

- Delay in obtaining access to email addresses or permission to post survey.
- Considered SurveyMonkey Audience, M-Turk, and other market research panels.
- Re-evaluated survey content.
- Reframed methodology and design to obtain substantive insights through qualitative rather than quantitative data.

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

- Demographic questions (1-5)
- Question 6: Have you experienced stress as a result of isolation associated with teaching online in the past year? This type of stress would be encountered by the inability to meet face-to-face with peers, colleagues, or supervisors.

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

- Question 7: Have you experienced stress as a result of the technology required for teaching online in the past year? This type of stress would include the ability to download files, guides, locate resources, or email reliability necessary to run your class.

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

- Question 8: Have you experienced stress as a result of online system delay associated with teaching online in the past year? This type of stress would be any problems with the website preventing you from logging in, accessing a class, or another service necessary to run your class.

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

- Question 9: Have you experienced stress as a result of providing feedback within the required time frame issue associated with teaching online in the past year? This type of stress would include answering questions within 48 hours or providing feedback within 6 business days.

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

- Question 10: Have you experienced stress as a result of locating supplemental material for your online class in the past year? This type of stress would include locating external relevant and timely information vital for further discussion within the class or finding appropriate ways to include career skill information relevant to the class.

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

- Question 11: Have you experienced stress as a result of your own time management issues associated with teaching online in the past year? This type of stress would include the amount of time you have to prepare for a class, participate in the class, and provide feedback to students for a class. Typically, this could be a result of an emergency personal situation, an emergency added class by the University, or any interruption of your own effective time management skills.

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

- Question 12: Have you experienced stress as a result of any credentialing issues associated with teaching online in the past year? This type of stress would include the new requirement to publish, receiving reviews, or the ability to get approval to teach additional courses?

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

- Question 13: Think back to the last time you encountered the type of stress mentioned in the previous question. How would you describe the level of stress?

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

- Question 14: Approximately how many times have you encountered stress as a result of challenges logging in, accessing a class, or other services necessary to run your class? Choose the number of times below.

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

- Question 15: Think back to the last time you encountered the type of stress mentioned in the previous question. How would you describe the level of stress?

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

- Question 16: Which of the following strategies did you use to help you manage this stress? The response for this question will use a list of coping mechanisms and faculty can check all that apply.

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

- Talking with others
- Physical/Recreational activities
- Support groups/Mental health counselors
- Self-Destructive Behaviors (increased alcohol and other substance use)
- Self-Awareness (body's response to stress, difficulty sleeping, being easily angered, and having low energy)

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

- Self-Reflection (Note what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do)
- Project Management (Set priorities-decide what must get done & what can wait; Learn to say no to new tasks if they are putting you into overload)

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

- Question 17: Which strategy (adaptive mechanism) was effective in decreasing stress associated with teaching in the online class environment in the past year?

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

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- Physical/Recreational activities
- Support groups/Mental health counselors
- Self-Destructive Behaviors (increased alcohol and other substance use)
- Self-Awareness (body's response to stress, difficulty sleeping, being easily angered, and having low energy)

Phase 1 Methodology

Survey Content

- Self-Reflection (Note what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do)
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Phase 2 Methodology

What We Did

Model

“This essay conveys the results of an informal, non-representative survey of law faculty conducted in May 2020. The principal findings are that law professors themselves were under considerable stress during the pandemic, that they altered their modes of delivery and interaction with students, and that they would

Phase 2 Methodology

What We Did

Model

like students, colleagues, and school administrators to recognize the complex experiences of law faculty teaching during the pandemic. The initial survey results here could serve as a basis for law school deans and others to develop school-specific surveys that might elicit more specific feedback about the

Phase 2 Methodology

What We Did

Model

experiences of faculty members at their schools. That feedback would enable law school leaders develop programs that support their faculty and students” (Crawford & Simon, 2020).

Phase 2 Methodology

What We Did

- Qualitative descriptive case study
- Convenience sample
- Data collected through online survey distributed through email
- Open-ended questions

Phase 2 Methodology With Whom

Interdisciplinary undergraduate and graduate
online faculty

Phase 2 Methodology

Where

Online university in southwestern United States

Phase 2 Methodology

Survey Content

- How do you feel about isolation and lack of opportunities to connect with colleagues in the asynchronous teaching environment?
- How do you provide timely, individualized, and constructive feedback?
- What do you do when the online classroom is "down" due to system maintenance or an unanticipated connectivity issue?

Phase 2 Methodology

Survey Content

- What are your strategies for integrating current trends (equity, diversity, inclusiveness, etc.) into classroom curricula?
- How could university administration better support faculty and students in the asynchronous environment?

Phase 3 Methodology

What We Will Do

- Survey the “Online Learning Collective” Facebook group: Includes “faculty of all ranks, graduate students, and higher education staff who want to develop their online pedagogy and praxis.”
- Research or information gathering posts must be approved by admins before submitting.
Send requests to
hello@higheredlearningcollective.org

Phase 3 Methodology With Whom

Interdisciplinary online undergraduate and
graduate faculty

Phase 3 Methodology

Where

Global online higher education community

Discussion

What stress management mechanisms help online faculty?

Discussion

Stress triggers include:

- Increased workload and demand
- Inability to manage time
- Inability to focus
- Isolation and loneliness
- Fear of failure
- Learning curve reducing work/life balance

Discussion

- Maintain an open mind, receptive attitude, and flexible approach to connecting with others.
- Practice yoga.
- Connect with others.
- Reframe situations to create new perspectives and visualize challenge as opportunity (Anaissie & Olesund, 2016).

Discussion

Recommendations for future research:

Reframe “seven principles of good practice”:

1. Faculty–student communication and collaboration;
2. Student–student communication and collaboration;
3. Active learning techniques;
4. Prompt feedback;
5. Appropriate time for tasks;
6. High performance expectations;
7. Respect for diverse learning styles (reframed in this context as ‘preferences’).

(Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996; Tanis, 2020)

Discussion

Recommendations for future research:

- Higher education administration should develop school-specific surveys that might elicit more specific feedback about the experiences of faculty members at their schools.
- That feedback would enable leadership to develop programs that support their faculty and students.

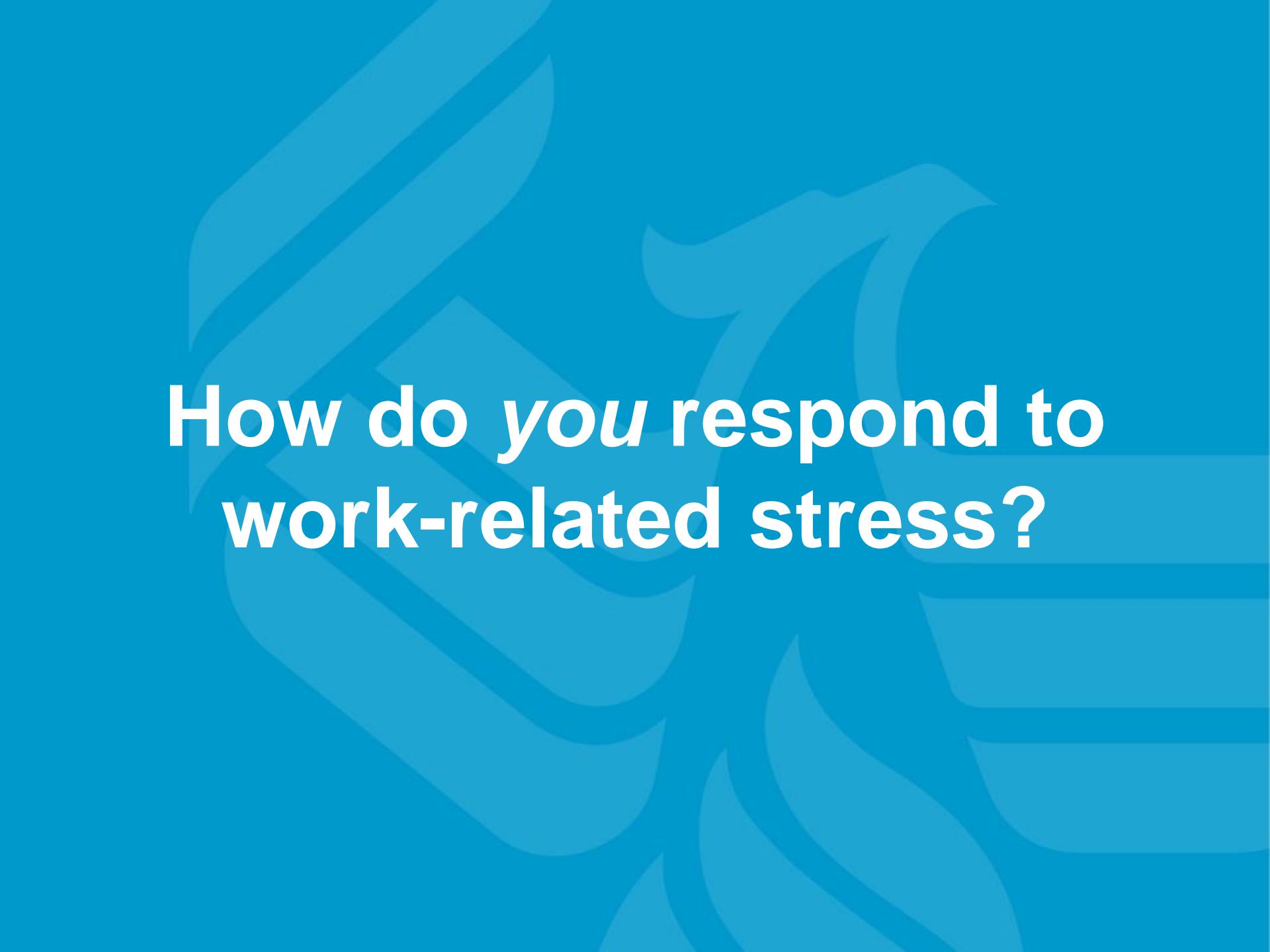
(Crawford & Simon, 2020)

Discussion

Recommendations for future research:

- Results of survey of 2,758 faculty members from 25 public institutions showed high level of stress.
- Stress varied among different types of institution and demographic groups.
- Need to elaborate theoretical models on faculty development and stress to include processes of stress appraisal and coping.

(Han et al., 2020)



**How do you respond to
work-related stress?**

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