The Art of Resilience: Strategies to Thrive in a Stressful World

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The bamboo that bends is stronger than the oak that resists.

*Japanese Proverb*

Course Overview

In this course, you will learn practical strategies to manage your stress, meet challenges with a positive mindset, adapt to change, and grow from failure. You will also engage in self-reflection, participate in meaningful class discussions and activities, try out new stress management techniques, and challenge yourself to be vulnerable.

The course is designed to build your resilience by highlighting four important skill areas.

- **Social Engagement:** The ability to cultivate social connections and avoid social isolation is a critical developmental challenge.
- **Self-awareness & Self-care:** Self-awareness is a person’s capacity to clearly understand their own strengths, weaknesses, emotions, values, natural inclinations, tendencies and motivation. Self-care refers to the behaviors, thoughts, and attitudes we hold to maintain our overall well-being and personal health.
- **Attention & Focus:** Attention allows you to "tune out" information, sensations and perceptions that are not relevant at the moment and instead focus your energy on the information that is important.
- **Meaning:** The act of "making sense" of an experience; the end purpose or significance of something.

You will be given a journal as a gift. Use this journal to take notes and complete activities and homework assignments for the class. I hope you will continue to use it after the class is over!

At the beginning of the course, you will complete a self-assessment measuring your resiliency and self-care. At the end of the course, you will do the self-assessment a second time so that you can see your growth.

*A note about vulnerability:*

In this course, you will be asked to be vulnerable. You will be asked to do some deep self-reflection and participate in group discussions about potentially emotional topics, such as personal insecurities and failure. In some activities you will be asked to be share information about your authentic self (e.g. your
hopes, dreams, or fears) with classmates. This is one of the things many students say they love most about this class.

Please remember: You are only required to share what you feel comfortable sharing. You always have the option to “pass” on any question or in-class activity. You also are free to leave the room if at any time you feel uncomfortable, and I will reach out after class to check in with you and offer my assistance and support. You will not be penalized for doing so.

Only those who dare to fail greatly, can ever achieve greatly.

Robert F. Kennedy

Assignments

Each class has a homework assignment. (See next section for weekly homework assignments.)

The final project for this course has three parts:

1) Personal Essay:
   a) Write an essay about a time in your life when you failed at something significant. Something that really mattered to you.
   b) This essay should be 3-6 pages, Times New Roman, size 12, double spaced, 1 inch margins.
   c) Use the following questions to help frame your essay.
      i. What was so challenging about this situation for you, personally?
      ii. What were the consequences of this failure?
      iii. Research examples of others’ failure stories (Oprah getting fired from her news anchor job, Steve Jobs getting ousted from the company he started, politicians who have lost elections, etc.). Choose one and relate it to your own story.
         1. What do you have in common?
         2. What can you learn from their story?
      iv. What automatic coping responses did you observe when it happened?
      v. What proactive coping strategies did you try?
      vi. What would you do differently if you experienced the same type of failure again in the future?
      vii. How could you interpret this failure as a good thing?
      viii. How do you feel about failure now? Is it different than how you felt when this happened? What has changed?

2) Vision board:
   a) A vision board is a visualization tool typically containing a combination of words and pictures that represent your goals and dreams.
   b) Your vision board can be created with paper and mixed media, or it can be done digitally using PowerPoint, Canva, or another program. It can be any size or shape. It does not have to be 2-dimensional. It could even be a video or live performance. Be as creative as you want!
   c) Your vision board should include, reference, or represent:
      i. Your top strengths
ii. Your values
iii. Your purpose
iv. Your unique mission
v. Your social supports
vi. Your favorite ways to manage stress
vii. Your big takeaways from the course (growth mindset, reframing negative thoughts, importance of sleep, mindfulness, effective planning, etc.)

3) Vision board oral presentation:
   a) You will have 3 minutes to present your vision board on the final day of class. Please practice your 3-minute presentation ahead of time; it should be polished. This is a great opportunity to practice your public speaking skills. If you are planning to submit a video or performance-based vision board, keep it to 3 minutes.

   Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.
   
   Confucius

Weekly Schedule, Learning Objectives, and Homework

Week 1: Foundations of Resiliency

Learning objectives:

• Participants will define resiliency.
• Participants will explain the stress continuum.
• Participants will discuss daily self-care practices.

Homework:

• Assignment:
  o Self-Care Self-Assessment activity
  o Character Strengths Self-Assessment & Journal Reflection
    ▪ Complete your Character Strengths Self-Assessment online at http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths/VIA-Classification
    ▪ Print and bring your results to Week Two class.
    ▪ Choose ONE of your top five strengths and write a journal entry describing how this strength has helped you in life so far.

• Readings:
  o “7 Strange Questions That Help You Find Your Life Purpose” by Mark Manson retrieved from https://markmanson.net/life-purpose
Week 2: Mission and Purpose

Learning objectives:

- Participants will identify 5 personal character strengths.
- Participants will compare “purpose” and “mission.”
- Participants will discuss the concept of the “authentic self.”
- Participants will evaluate the impact of purpose, mission, and values in their own lives.

Homework:

- Assignment: Write a journal reflection: “What kind of impact is the most important impact that I (with my unique strengths, values, and passions) can create?”
- Readings:
  - “The Social Muscle” by John T. Cacioppo and Stephanie Cacioppo, Harvard Business Review retrieved from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/531897cde4b0fa5080a9b19e/t/59df8e144c0dbfb7c51960ed/1507823125603/the-social-muscle.pdf

Week 3: Social Connectedness

Learning objectives:

- Participants will recognize the importance of social connectedness.
- Participants will identify the three dimensions of social support.
- Participants will list campus resources for instructional and informational support.
- Participants will examine a challenging social situation and their response.

Homework:

- Assignments:
  - “Practice Being Your Authentic Self in Relationships” exercise
  - Do the “36 Questions” activity discussed in class with a friend, partner, roommate, or acquaintance you’d like to get to know better, and write a journal reflection about the experience.
- Reading:

Week 4: Self-Awareness and Mindset

Learning objectives:
Participants will compare the Growth Mindset and Fixed Mindset.
Participants will distinguish between automatic responses and active coping responses to stress.
Participants will practice reframing negative thoughts and self-talk.

Homework:

- Assignment:
  - “Transforming Stressful Experiences Through Self Awareness” exercise
- Readings:
  - (video) Inside the Mind of a Master Procrastinator – Tim Urban’s TED Talk https://www.ted.com/talks/tim_urban_inside_the_mind_of_a_master_procrastinator

**Week 5: Attention & Focus**

Learning objectives:

- Participants will distinguish between effective planning and ineffective planning.
- Participants will explain the state of focus called “flow.”
- Participants will practice using two mindfulness techniques.
- Participants will evaluate the impact of a mindfulness exercise on their wellbeing.

Homework:

- Assignments:
  - Try an online guided meditation from YouTube or another source that is at least 15 minutes long and write a journal reflection on the experience and its impact on your wellbeing.
  - Complete your final essay and vision board, and prepare your vision board presentation for next week.

**Week 6: Putting it All Together**

Learning objectives:

- Participants will formulate personal goals in each skill area.
- Participants will design and present a vision board representing their purpose, mission, character strengths, mindset, self-care & mindfulness practices, and personal goals.

Homework:

- Go out there and rock it!

*Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.*

*Helen Keller*
Grading
This class is Pass/Fail. If you attend every class, participate, and complete your final essay, vision board and vision board presentation, you will pass. If you have more than one unexcused absence, you will not pass. If you do not complete the final essay, vision board project and presentation, you will not pass.

I get knocked down, but I get up again. You’re never gonna keep me down.
*Chumbawamba*

Attendance and Expectations
Success in this course is based on the expectation that you will spend 2 hours per week on weekly homework assignments, preparing your final essay, vision board and presentation, and practicing the skills you are learning in class.

Your attendance is a crucial to this course. A large part of what makes this course special is the community we build over our six weeks together, and each member’s presence is vital to that process. As such, the only absences that will be excused are for illness, emergencies, or major life disruptions. More than one unexcused absence will result in a failing grade in the class. If you feel you cannot fully adhere to this policy you should reconsider taking this course until you are able to commit the time.

You are expected to take notes in your journal throughout the course. Please do not use laptops or screens in class, unless specifically instructed to do so.

Failure is a bruise, not a tattoo.
*Jon Sinclair*

Communication Preferences
It is my goal to be as available as possible to you. In my role in Health and Wellness Promotion, I am happy to be able to connect you to additional wellness resources and programs on and off campus.

I do not consistently check work email after 5pm on weekdays or on the weekends. While it is possible I could respond to your email in the evening or on a weekend, do not expect this. However, I will be sure to respond to your emails within one business day.

If you miss class, reach out to a classmate to discuss what you missed. All presentations, worksheets, and assignments will be posted on Latte. If you need a document or file, please check Latte first before emailing me to ask for it.
Accommodations
If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me as soon as possible.

Texts
There are no required course texts for this class to purchase. All readings and presentations will be distributed in class and uploaded to the course Latte page.

Prerequisites
There are no prerequisites for this class. All are welcome.

Why do we fall, Bruce? So we can learn to pick ourselves up.

Batman Begins

Academic Integrity
You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS - Library guides.

Prioritizing Wellness
Your health and wellness is a priority. I encourage you to take advantage of all the resources on campus to help support your physical and mental/emotional health and wellbeing this semester, and throughout your time at Brandeis.

www.brandeis.edu/health
http://www.brandeis.edu/health/hawp/hawp
www.brandeis.edu/counseling
www.brandeis.edu/parc

Do not judge me by my successes, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again.

Nelson Mandela