Rigor vs Grace: Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic in Higher Education Nutrition Programs

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Background: The COVID-19 pandemic caused nutrition educators in higher education to shift from traditional course delivery and student engagement models. Instructors faced unprecedented challenges to balance rigorous academic standards with providing grace in light of the pandemic.

Objective: To determine how nutrition educators in higher education define rigor and grace, explore approaches to rigor and grace and institutional guidance during the pandemic, and gauge perceived pandemic impacts on students’ educational experience.

Study Design, Settings, Participants: This online, cross-sectional study included nutrition educators (n=31) in Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics programs. A 23-item survey was developed and underwent expert review (n=5). Data were collected from March-April 2022.

Measurable Outcome/Analysis: Descriptive statistics were used for demographics and quantifying perceived changes due to COVID-19. Thematic analysis by two coders was used to analyze qualitative data, using an inductive approach to determine themes.

Results: Respondents taught in 30 states at undergraduate and graduate levels (58.1%) with 6-15 (58.1%) years of teaching experience. Qualitative definitions of rigor included two themes: challenging standards and student engagement and outcomes. Grace also had two themes: flexibility and human approach. Most (58.1%) respondents’ institutions did not provide recommendations regarding rigor but (96.8%) encouraged showing additional grace amidst the pandemic. Institutional response was coded into two themes: teaching support and self-care strategies. Faculty (51.6%) reported implementing strategies to ensure continued rigor; themes for instructor response included innovation and variation. Most faculty (61.2%) reported changes in relationships with students since the pandemic. Perceived pandemic impacts on nutrition education fell into three themes: disengagement, innovation, and human-first acknowledgment.

Conclusion: Nutrition educators defined rigor and grace as engaging students with challenging standards while also using a flexible, human-first approach. As educators navigate a post-pandemic world, institutional response is needed to empower instructors to balance rigor and grace in ways that maximize student outcomes.

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Role of Sociodemographic, Academic, and Individual Health Behaviors on Psychological Well-Being Among College Students

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Background: College is a time that brings a host of new challenges, including changes in environment, support systems, academic load, financial status, food security, and other factors. Studies have found that having strong psychological well-being (PWB) is a useful tool for these additional stressors. However, the relationship PWB has with these factors, specifically, is unclear.

Objective: This study aimed to identify behaviors and other factors that may influence PWB among college students.

Study Design, Settings, Participants: Data from 1,439 undergraduate students (58.65% White, 20.71% Black or African American, 9.68% Asian or Asian American, 7.19% biracial or multiracial, and 3.77% Hispanic or Latino/a/x) from the American College Health Association National College Health Assessment III (Fall 2020) were used in this secondary data analysis.

Measurable Outcome/Analysis: Variables included sociodemographic (age, gender, race), academic (year in school, enrollment status, housing, GPA), BMI, physical activity, financial challenges, and individual health behaviors (dietary patterns, physical activity, stress, and sleeping patterns). Differences in absolute values among PWB percentiles (25th, 50th, and 75th percentile) were analyzed using ANOVA. Multiple regression analyses were performed to measure the influence of all factors combined on PWB.

Results: The average age of the respondents was 22.15±6.56 years, and most were White (58.65%) females (72.60%). Regarding academic factors, most respondents were first year college students (24.39%), enrolled full-time (88.25%), living off-campus (38.07%), and with a 4.0 GPA (57.32%). Significant differences were observed in age, GPA, financial challenges, and health behaviors by PWB percentiles (p<0.05). Older age, being female (compared to male), higher GPA, being a full-time student, higher intake of vegetables, less time required to fall asleep, and lower stress levels were positively associated with higher PWB scores (p<0.05).

Conclusion: Findings indicate that academic environment and individual health behaviors have a relationship with PWB among college students. Targeting these factors...
when addressing PWB on college campuses may lead to better outcomes and should be investigated further. 

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**Stakeholder Input for Creating and Implementing a Meal Kit Service Program in Communities With Low Income**

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**Objective:** To describe how community stakeholder (partners and target audience members) input was utilized to modify a meal kit (MK) program implemented in communities with low income.

**Use of Theory or Research:** Local partnerships increase the efficacy of community-based interventions. Recently, stakeholders provided feedback on the development and implementation of a healthy community-based MK program for communities with low income.

**Target Audience:** Partners (N=29) were representatives of organizations within each neighborhood who regularly engaged with the target audience. Input was also obtained from these eligible participants (N=38) who are SNAP-eligible main food preparers, ≥18 years and had ≥1 child in the household.

**Program Description:** A previously piloted 6-week MK program that improved dietary and cooking behaviors was modified based on stakeholder feedback. Participants received ingredients for three meals/week for a family of four, prepared by a local nonprofit or high school culinary students, and picked up at local partner sites.

**Evaluation Methods:** Partner meetings were held and recorded quarterly to gain insight from stakeholders. Partners were asked to provide input on best recruitment methods and program logistics through quarterly meetings. Target audience members completed a survey asking about preferred recipes, meal kit access, and barriers to preparing food at home.

**Results:** Partners suggested using text messaging, allowing an alternate pick-up person, and utilizing flexible pick-up windows to accommodate participant schedules or unexpected events. Target audience members preferred front door delivery (55.3%) and/or central pick up (55.3%) and noted that time (60.8%) and access to grocery store/transportation (51.4%), among others, are barriers to preparing food at home. While most MK were picked up during the scheduled windows, ≥5.5% used flex pick-up for various reasons. The overall retention rate from baseline to post was 82.7%.

**Conclusion:** Stakeholder input is critical for participant retention and community program success. MK program stakeholders provided data on barriers to accessing a MK service, suggested asking for feedback about communication preferences, and encouraged flexibility during pickup times.

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**The Acceptability and Efficacy of a Virtual vs Hybrid Wellness Program on Health Outcomes Among Faculty and Staff Post COVID**

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**Objective:** The purpose of this research was to determine the acceptability and efficacy of a virtual versus hybrid health and wellness program for university faculty and staff and improve health outcomes and well-being while mitigating stress post COVID-19.

**Use of Theory or Research:** Pender’s Health Promotion Model (HPM) was used to promote behavior change and a healthy lifestyle. The underpinnings were integrated into the wellness program with assessment tools, educational sessions, and a behavior tracking app.

**Target Audience:** The principal investigator (PI) recruited faculty and staff members at a northeastern university in the spring of 2022. Participants (n=61) included women (77%), 30-50 years of age (67.7%), and staff (30%) vs. faculty (70%) enrolled in the study.

**Program Description:** Participants were randomized to virtual (V) (n = 32) and hybrid (H) (n = 29) wellness intervention groups. Upon consent, participants completed cholesterol, blood pressure (BP), and weight screening, and pretest questionnaires, WHO-5 wellness (perceived life quality) and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). The 6-week intervention included 30-minute sessions on wellness, nutrition, exercise, yoga, sleep, and positive thinking. Participants set wellness related goals and tracked progress using a health tracking app, StickK.

**Evaluation Methods:** Following the intervention, participants V (n=16) and H (n=13) completed post-tests: cholesterol, BP, weight, WHO-5, and PSS. Immediately following biochemical data collection, the PI conducted focus groups with these completers to assess program acceptability. Independent t-tests were performed for differences between groups using SPSS v 29.

**Results:** The analysis revealed no significant change in outcome measures between groups. Qualitative data analysis revealed common obstacles for participation like time, illness, work, and family. Themes for ‘lack of participation’ included: increased faculty workload, increased prevalence of COVID-19, preferred online or hybrid ses-

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