Transcript - ASU Remote 2022:
Caring for the Whole Student

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[MUSIC PLAYING]

JENNI ATWOOD: Hello. And welcome to Remote, the connected faculty summit. I'm Jenni Atwood with Every Learner Everywhere, and I'll be moderating today's session. The 3/2 hour sessions in this 90-minute ask the experts block are sponsored by Every Learner Everywhere, a non-profit network that advocates for and supports institutions in achieving equitable outcomes in US higher education through advances in digital learning. This first block of four every learner asks the expert session blocks focuses on students.

Our second session in this Every Learner Everywhere block focusing on students is titled caring for the whole student, a look at how institutions can care for the whole student, particularly in light of the mental health crisis facing students today. Our two presenters are the authors of a report with the same name as the session on various stressors students are facing today. Gentry Croley is a senior strategist and member of the education team at Intentional Futures, with a background in secondary education, office management, and counseling.

With professional experience, combined with her MA in psychology and BS in business administration, has offered her many opportunities to polish her creative thinking and problem-solving skills to work through complex issues in various industries. She is inspired and motivated by promoting a positive change in the world, particularly for racially minoritized people and people from low income backgrounds. Nolie Ramsey brings experience in post-secondary education, writing instruction, and equity-oriented program administration to her work in the education team at Intentional Futures. Previously, Nolie served as a writing instructor and writing program administrator at the University of Washington, where she focused on creating great institutional access for first generation and racially minoritized college students. She holds a BA in English from Mississippi College and an MA in English language and literature from the University of

Washington. She is also currently an English PhD candidate at the University of Washington. OK. Handing it over to you, Gentry and Nolie.

GENTRY CROLEY: Hi, everyone. Thank you so much for joining us today. To give you a little extra background, Nolie and I co-authored this resource called "Caring for the Whole Student," along with Tia Holiday, another colleague and equity expert in the education space. We started this project in an effort to bring to light the various issues students are grappling with as they navigate college. Recent suicide psychology students have made national headlines and made it clear there's a major problem. We wanted to dig a little bit deeper to see how we might help faculty and department leaders address it.

While our presentation today was developed using the same research as caring for the whole student and we did our best to include the most critical pieces, we know we don't have time to get to everything. So we encourage you to read the whole resource on the Every Learner website. Our agenda today is built around making sure you are aware of the major burden students are facing, how these burdens can impact education, what faculty and department leaders can do, and where to find more resources. We're hoping that by the time we're finished talking, we'll answer some of the more pressing questions. But we also want to leave some space for you to ask questions of your own. So let's jump in. What are students concerned most about? Deloitte Global's 2021 millennial and Gen Z survey found that the biggest concerns for this group are financial insecurity, climate change, and anxieties around healthcare. Now, obviously, this list is not exhaustive. We encourage you to build relationships with students so you can better understand what's happening both with individual students and with certain groups. No one's going to talk a little bit more about how to do this later. First, let's talk about financial insecurity.

The cost of obtaining a college degree has increased significantly over the years, as many of you probably know. What used to feel manageable and realistic for many students now feels well out of reach without accumulating huge sums of debt. And when you add in the cost of room and board, the cost of getting a degree goes up even further. Latinx students, which is a fifth of the higher education population, don't want to take on debt because they don't want to burden their families in that way.

But without taking on student loans, they have to work long hours to pay their way through school, leaving less time for studying.

Both options can have grave impacts on students mental health, presenting a lose-lose situation. And the cost of regular, everyday expenses continues to climb as the United States grapples with inflation, supply chain issues, and sanctions that have impacted the cost of imported goods-- rent, food, gas. Surely, most of you have experienced this as well. Seems like every day it's becoming more difficult to keep up. Due to systemic racism, these issues affect Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people and people who are affected by poverty more than others.

A 2022 survey by Weissman of nearly 5,000 students from private and public historically Black colleges and universities found that 46% of students lacked sufficient food, 55% were housing insecure, and 20% were homeless at some point during the year. To keep up with rising costs, many students take on jobs while they go to school. But entering the workforce has its own implications on mental health. This graph gives you just a small glimpse into the gravity of the financial struggle students are facing, with almost half of both two and four-year students saying they could not afford balanced meals.

A whopping 35% to 40% of students are skipping meals or cutting down on food portions to make sure they have enough to get by each month. Now, let me ask you this. How difficult is it to learn, to retain information, to think critically when you're hungry? The fact is if our students are hungry, they're not at their best. And not only do hunger and food insecurity cause difficulty in learning in the immediate term, but they can also lead to issues later in life, including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and obesity.

For some students, financial insecurity is all they can think about. Students impacted by poverty have no other choice than to consider how every one of their decisions will affect their finances. Each time they buy food or toilet paper, every time they need to put gas in the car or ride public transportation, they're asking how it could hurt their budget for the month. It's an absolutely exhausting way to operate, but there isn't any way around it. And to add to this stress, there's the issue of climate change.

Not only are millennials and Gen Z students being taught about the dangers of climate change in school, but they're also seeing the effects on the news and in their communities. Students are watching as the ice sheets melt, glaciers retreat, snow cover decreases, sea levels rise, and extreme weather events wreak havoc around the world.

They're evacuating their homes as wildfires spread. Storms threaten massive flooding and extreme heating or freezing events kill their neighbors. Each of these has occurred in just the past two years, and we know there's more to come.

Racially minoritized communities are especially vulnerable. One example of how is what's known as the urban heat island effect. This effect is what happens when a city or a part of a city is made up of mostly concrete, asphalt, and buildings. Without many or any green spaces, the heat is highly concentrated. So these deadly heat waves are hotter and last longer in the center of urban areas. According to a study published in Nature Communications, racially minoritized people are more exposed to this extreme heat than white people in an astonishing 97% of US cities.

To put this into perspective, NASA has found that surface temperatures in the city often exceed desert temperatures. I want to let that sink in for a moment. Excuse me. Now, I live in Las Vegas. And I happen to enjoy life in the desert, as I'm sure some of our friends at ASU do. But having the temperatures in the middle of a city like New York exceed what I'm seeing where I live is absurd. And that's not the only symptom of climate change that Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities and communities impacted by poverty bear the brunt of. Black people are 75% more likely to live in communities that border commercial facilities that produce emissions, odor, noise, and traffic.

Indigenous communities are more likely to rely on seafood, meaning they're dramatically impacted by ocean acidification. And still today, aid dispersal for minoritized communities impacted by natural disasters lags behind the aid disbursed for wider or wealthier communities. Overall, when we take a step back and we evaluate what's happening with the climate, we realize that students and younger generations in general have inherited a massive job that they didn't ask for. We're asking them to do it while they juggle school, and often part time or even full time jobs. And they know the work is not optional, and it comes with trauma of its own.

Students are regularly having devastating memories etched into their brains. This student shared that the Thomas Fire has left a memory of panic and chaos. She went on to say that her family, friends, and neighbors lost their homes and everything they've ever known. This is one of the many reasons it's so important to take a trauma-informed approach to teaching. Having faculty members who are sympathetic and

compassionate helps students to heal from their trauma and get back to learning more quickly.

Another thing to consider is that some elements of this climate change and financial insecurity lead to problems with health. Even setting COVID aside, the US health care system is inadequate in a number of ways. It's costly to be treated, even for people who have access to health insurance. It's unevenly assessed, especially for Black, Latinx and Indigenous communities and communities impacted by poverty. And there is an intense focus on reactive care versus proactive or preventative care, leading to even higher costs down the road. When we compare US spending on healthcare to other countries, we can see that we far out spend comparative countries per capita.

Now, COVID put all of these issues in the spotlight and certainly amplified them, along with some other pressing issues. For example, for racially minoritized students, the pandemic caused really disruptive changes in finances, living situations, academic performance, and career goals. Poverty-impacted students were 55% more likely to delay graduation and 41% more likely to report that COVID impacted their major choice. Thinking all the way back to the beginning of the pandemic, just at the time when many students needed mental health support the most, their campuses shut down and they were sent home without a set return date. Some were able to access telehealth, for instance, but others were left without anywhere to return. All of these things can take a toll on overall mental health. The wait times, the level of care, fighting with insurance companies who choose not to cover necessary medical expenses. Those who seek help are often put on wait lists to see mental health practitioners, adding to their frustration. Students and their families have to depend on a system that is both fragile and fragmented.

There are serious harms being created and problems being created within an industry that aims to do no harm. We can look at-- just take injuries, for example, car accidents. Injuries often lead to prescription pain pills, which can then lead to addiction. Those aged 18 to 25 are more than twice as likely to have an illicit drug disorder than any other age group. And we know that addiction has been criminalized, which can lead to students being kicked out of school, or becoming ineligible for student loans, or both.

So I'm going to stop talking, take a step back, and let Nolie take over so she can talk a little bit about impact and some solutions.

NOLIE RAMSEY: Thanks, Gentry. So some of the impacts on students mental health may be more obvious than others. As Gentry noted at the beginning of this presentation, universities around the country are contending with an increase in students dying by suicide. For years, suicide has been a leading cause of death among teenagers and young adults, an age range which we know can encompass many college students. Initial data indicates that the pandemic has exacerbated this and contributed to an increase in suicidal ideation, especially among Black, Latinx, adults, and young adults.

Financial insecurity, climate change, and health care concerns and their impacts on mental health also show up in more subtle ways in the classroom. While every student is different, common impacts include students missing deadlines, dropping classes, taking a break from their education, or dropping out entirely. Trauma, which as Gentry noted, is a common impact of chronic financial insecurity, climate change events, and health concerns, as well as systemic oppression broadly, can significantly change the way students can be present in the classroom.

Challenges with memory and focus, reoccurring absences, fear of risk taking, increased anxiety around deadlines and exams, increased isolation, and difficulty with emotional regulation are just some of the common indicators of trauma in college students. And this may be obvious, but this can have detrimental impacts on students education. So it's critical that students mental health is addressed appropriately so students can be at their best while they're learning.

Financial insecurity, climate change, and health care concerns are large, systemic problems that are compounded by the effects of systemic racism. And as you probably know, they're not easily addressed, and especially not by single faculty member or even a single institution. These problems require much larger, collaborative, and multifaceted solutions. But we do believe that there are some policy and pedagogical shifts that can be implemented by faculty and department leaders that will resist reproducing the harm towards students and better supporting students overall.

So cost is a major barrier for students. And this is one area where faculty can be really impactful. Low or no cost instructional materials, like open educational resources, or OER, as well as providing copies of material licensed through the campus library can really help students reduce costs. If you are planning and you must use resources that students have to pay for, we encourage you to talk to publishers about providing two

weeks of free access to all content. This is especially important for students who rely on financial aid, as aid is often not disbursed in time within the first couple of weeks for students to be able to purchase materials for the course.

Most vendors are also willing to provide a small percentage of scholarship accounts for those who cannot afford the full price. You just have to ask. With this solution, however, be mindful that students may not feel comfortable disclosing their financial situation with you. You are, at this point, probably a stranger to them. So communicating a no questions asked policy with the entire class, that makes it clear that you are not going to probe for details of their financial situation beyond what they freely offer and are comfortable with sharing can make them feel more comfortable and asking for this option.

If we look at the campus wide situation, even when institutions do their best to provide services to help students, another barrier is uncovered pretty quickly. Students often aren't aware that these support services are available to them on campus. And that's probably true for many faculty members as well. I know that was the case for me. I was constantly learning new things that were available on campus. And so it's really important to identify student support programs that provide extra course materials early on as well. They exist and you can find them.

Wherever possible, we also encourage faculty to create a consolidated resource in the LMS for the course so that students can very easily find all of the resources available for their more basic needs, both on campus and in local community. Canvas suggests using a pop-up option to advertise services available to students. And some of the services you might be on the lookout for to tell students about-- food pantries and food banks, low or no cost childcare, mental health resources and services, and then identity-specific services and resources. So think of groups that serve the LGBTQI plus community, Indigenous communities, recent refugees, former foster youth, et cetera. There are lots of identity-specific groups meeting the needs specifically of those students.

So additionally, there are a number of pedagogical shifts that you can make to better support racially minoritized students and students experiencing poverty as they contend with the impacts of climate change, health concerns, financial insecurity, and systemic racism. So first, create a course that has flexible deadlines. As we know, communities

are experiencing unpredictable weather events at unprecedented numbers, many of which are resulting in loss of utility services, including electricity, water, and internet, last minute evacuations of entire neighborhoods and cut off access to roads and highways.

Flexibility in deadlines can provide some immediate peace of mind for students navigating these difficult circumstances in their communities. This policy change can also benefit students beyond climate disasters, however. If you think about it, the last thing that a student should be thinking about is emailing their instructor to ask for an extension when they suddenly find themselves in the hospital, or they are suddenly faced with finding new housing due to a rent hike. The second thing you can do is ground instructional materials and the emerging needs for students and their communities and remain culturally responsive in your approach.

Culturally responsive pedagogy, or CRE, acknowledges that students come into the classroom with a wealth of knowledge and experiences. CRE insists that materials should reflect students individual and intersectional identities in a positive and affirming way that allows them to connect with their learning to their lived experiences and histories. Resources such as NYU's culturally responsive scorecard, which was created originally for secondary settings, nonetheless, can really help faculty evaluate their curriculum and embed more culturally responsive content throughout.

We also touched on this a bit ago, but you can approach teaching from a trauma-informed perspective as well. So Education Northwest has created an extensive guide for institutions and faculty on how to shift campus and classroom practices to become more trauma-informed, and we really recommend you check that out. Quickly, we'll provide some additional ways of creating more supportive learning environments. And these include creating a syllabus that is welcoming and inviting. So this may sound obvious, but a syllabus is your first impression to students.

So in the caring for students playbook on Every Learner Everywhere website, we have some great insights on this along with our next recommendation, which is to create alternative methods for assessment. So offering assessments other than traditional multiple choice exams has been shown to lower test anxiety for students and provide students with flexibility and agency over how they demonstrate their learning. Caring for students outlines several examples of methods that you could use for assessment,

such as peer review, experimentation, and online journaling. And those are just a few examples.

Finally, we also encourage you to be mindful about using online proctoring software, such as Respondus or ProctorU, and virtual learning environments. In recent years, especially with the pandemic, institutions have increased their use of online assessment proctoring tools that monitor student movements through their internet browsers. It looks at their physical environments as well while they're taking exams. They're intended to be a safeguard against academic dishonesty, but students share that it also increases their anxiety and their distrust in their course and about using the software.

And so we could dive more into this later. But there are a lot of accessibility, equity, and privacy concerns with these softwares. And so wherever possible, we encourage you, instead of relying on lockdown browsers and proctoring services, to try to create assessments that are difficult to cheat on to begin with, as well as create learning conditions where students feel less pressured to cheat. We think that these are more holistic solutions that are better aligned with what students need in order to be supported.

Some other helpful ideas that you can consider is practice grading policies that reward success rather than punish failure, and then design a course with universal design for learning principles or EDL principles in mind. And this can look like using multiple discussion modes, including options to start or join a conversation anonymously with students names only visible to the instructor so that every student feels comfortable and finds the opportunity to contribute. I'll hand it back to Gentry.

GENTRY CROLEY: Thanks so much, Nolie. Again, we couldn't possibly list all of the things the students are struggling with. And we don't expect faculty to be able to solve all of their problems. We encourage you to build relationships with your students and with student support services so you can see warning signs when things aren't going well and offer support wherever possible. A few shifts in practice can have massive impacts on students.

A culturally responsive, trauma-informed approach to teaching will lead to better student outcomes and could even save lives. You can read the full caring for the whole student resource and find other resources at everylearnerever ywhere.org/resources.

And we'll share a link with a catalog of other related resources as well. Thank you all so much for listening. We're happy to answer any questions that you may have.

JENNI ATWOOD: Thank you, Gentry and Nolie. I see that we have some questions from the audience. And for everyone, please go ahead and submit any additional questions in the Q&A tab. So our first question. If we can't use LockDown browsers in proctoring services, how can we maintain integrity on exams?

NOLIE RAMSEY: I'm happy to offer an answer on this. So I would first encourage you to look into offering exams that aren't easy to cheat on. From the beginning, a lot of the times the type of exams that are proctored using LockDown browsers are multiple choice exams. And yeah, those often don't require students to demonstrate a deep knowledge and therefore are more easily cheated on.

But furthermore, I would also ask you to explore what kind of classroom environment is being created where students feel the pressure to cheat. And it goes beyond, obviously, the classroom into larger institutional problems of the way that grades are tied to financial aid, so on. But trying to work with students to create an environment where there's less pressure to begin with for them to cheat and feel that pressure around grades. That's just my brief with at that question.

GENTRY CROLEY: Yeah, agreed. I don't have anything that would add any extra context there. That's great. Thanks, Nolie.

JENNI ATWOOD: OK. So our next question. If I notice a specific student is struggling, what should I do?

GENTRY CROLEY: Yeah, I can take that one. I think it's really case by case. And it kind of depends on what you're seeing with the student. If for example, a student has written things that are alarming or is alluding to suicide, or violence, or something like that, I think faculty members should pretty immediately reach out to a school counselor because they'll have a lot of resources. Excuse me for that issue. If students are late to class once or twice or misses a class or two but there are no other issues, then most likely there's no action really required.

If it's something in the middle like student is missing assignments, absent often, has poor performance on tests, for instance, I would say a really compassionate one-on-one meeting could help students to open up. But this goes back to really the need to know your students. You have to have conversations with them beforehand. You have to

know what to expect from your students in order to actually make a difference with them. So I would say two things are key. Flexibility, knowing your students. I guess the third thing would be knowing the resources on campus for those students.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

NOLIE RAMSEY: I think that's a great answer. Yeah.

JENNI ATWOOD: OK. OK. So our next question. Sometimes when I'm teaching virtually, I'm just talking to a bunch of circles with initials in them. It makes it hard to build relationships. Should I mandate that my students have their cameras on?

NOLIE RAMSEY: I can take a go at this.

GENTRY CROLEY: You do that - either way.

[CHUCKLES]

NOLIE RAMSEY: Well, maybe I can start just saying, like I've taught during the pandemic and have had that experience of teaching to a screen of black screens, like just blank screens. And I know it can be really hard as an instructor. It feels isolating. You feel like you're talking into a void. And especially if you're used to more engaged type of teaching where you're not lecturing and you want to be able to check in and assess people's learning, it can feel even harder to do that well.

I would strongly encourage, though, not to mandate cameras, just because you don't know where students are joining from. They could be in their dorm and have no control over who's coming into that space. Same with their home. It may reveal information about their living situation, their socioeconomic status they normally wouldn't have to disclose in a classroom. And so I think giving students the right to their privacy is really important. And within that, I don't know if we have it-- I don't want to go on and on.

But there are strategies. And center for teaching and learning at a university often has a lot of great ones about how to still have engagement and assess how students are learning material, are they following, are they understanding, without necessarily having to see their face. So that's my answer from my experience. Gentry, do you have anything to add?

GENTRY CROLEY: The only thing I would say is that it might be a good opportunity to offer like virtual or in-person office hours so that students feel that there's an open door

there and they can talk. Yeah. Other than that, that was a great answer, Nolie. Thank you.

JENNI ATWOOD: OK. So Probably our last question is, what specifically do you mean by flexible deadlines?

GENTRY CROLEY: Great question. I think what we would mean by that-- and Nolie you can chime in here whenever you want. We would just say that if you have set-- you obviously want to set deadlines for your courses and that's perfectly fine. But if there's a student who or if there's a situation, for example, let's take the winter storm in Texas. Though students did not have pretty much anything that they needed to do, they didn't have internet. They didn't have power. They didn't have anything that they needed. So there really needs to be extended deadlines for those particular assignments.

But then there are other students who they've just got something going on in their life, and they don't necessarily want to divulge all of the different things that they're going through. But it's worth if they seem like they're struggling and there's something going on and you can feel that and know that, then I would say it's important to just say, hey, we can give you a little bit of extra time on this. Some students will come right out and say it and others may not.

NOLIE RAMSEY: I would add just briefly. I've never done this, but I have colleagues who have, who have used rolling deadlines where it's a period of time that's much larger than a typical deadline would be just to give students a bit more flexibility over the course of one to two weeks to work on an assignment according to what's going on in their life and how much time they can dedicate to it according to things that are happening in that very moment or other classes and competing interests that they have for their time. So that is another way I would define flexible deadlines. I know that may not work for everyone and for your grading process, so on. But yeah. I also would say that sometimes different assessment methods, like if you are using a labor contract, can make room for students having more flexibility in getting things in without necessarily being punitive results for turning it in, quote, late.

JENNI ATWOOD: Wonderful. Thank you both so much, Gentry and Nolie. And thank you to everyone who joined us today for this session. And we hope that you can stick around now for our third session.