



What is More Important: Health or Education?

A bit of a dilemma? But the answer is clear with the total shutdown of ALL academic institutions around the world: yes, health is more important than education; health comes first.

But health isn't only about the physical well-being of a person. It isn't only about taking precautionary measures to protect our students from the current (COVID19-) pandemic, it is also important to help our students to stay mentally and psychologically healthy during this exhausting period.

No degree is worthy of a person's mental breakdown. No SLOs or academic achievements are more important than one's psychological balance.

As educators, we struggle with the concept of putting anything before education. I, for one, am guilty of that! When I see my kids "vegetating" at home, I suddenly turn into one of those "helicopter moms," hovering over their heads demanding tasks all the time.



The fact is, we are all restless, anxious, and insecure. We are all burned out due to the changes in every aspect in our lives, including how and where and when we work: the shift to online learning, the endless virtual existence on Zoom, the lengthy working hours from home, that is the new global trend, etc.

We feel disoriented, what is going on is surreal, sort of a nasty Sci-Fi "science fiction" movie, that our brains cannot compute! We feel demotivated dragging ourselves out of bed knowing that it will be "another day of lockdown". For young people, it is even more disheartening - all that energy, all those hormones, all the emotions and all the stress and the anxiety and the fears and the uncertainties. I don't envy them, they are not in a good place!

Since the shutdown, I have been receiving tons of messages and phone calls, from dismayed students and frustrated parents. Some students are facing difficulties we know nothing about. A student told me: "We live on prepaid phone cards; this is the only way I connect to the net. We don't have "unlimited" net access. I cannot afford Zoom or virtual learning." A mother called me, absolutely devastated, to tell me that there are only two computers in her household, and she has four children who have to be online at the same time. The dad is the breadwinner, so he keeps one laptop for himself, and the four others "have to sort it out!" Yes, these are real situations of real students, sadly.



Our students are clinging to us, hoping that we would help them to succeed in these unfamiliar circumstances, please let's try to help them as much as we can.

We need to lower (or better moderate) our expectations, and be realistic. Not a single institution in the world, regardless of its history or prestige, continued to work as it used to, with the same standards it kept for hundreds of years. They all had to make concessions due to the current circumstances. All of these concessions necessitate compromises from faculty and administration in order to facilitate life for the students.

We count on you. Please help us. Please help our students in their journey to success, keeping in mind that their health comes first, and that their mental health is as important as their physical health.

Respectfully yours,
Ahlam