

NOTE: This is the second part of a discussion with two students, Amy and Elyse, about their college experience.

INTRODUCTION: Welcome to another edition of Let's Talk Ed with Professor Chris. You al requested it: Today, we're talking to the students. Stay tuned.

CHRIS O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Here on the campus. Do you even know who you're supposed to go to when you're stressing out?

AMY: Yeah. They always mention the counseling center to me. I feel like, oh, I always feel like the counseling services are available.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Anywhere else that you go?

ELYSE: I've heard about that, but, I mean, I call my parents typically. But on campus, yeah.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: OK.

ELYSE: We could go to each other, I feel like, but ...

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Right, right.

ELYSE: So, I probably go there. Yeah.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: So, do you all know about a man or a woman called the ombudsman? Have you heard the term ombuds? OK, he's a, well, at my campus, there's a guy that I'm hoping to interview, but this is the person that handles conflicts. OK, so I know we're bouncing all over the place. We're gonna come back to that. I wanna go back to faculty. I did ask if you think your faculty or your professors care, and I think I got a yes there. What happens, again, I'm bouncing all over the place. We'll come back to stress, but what happens if you have an issue with your professor? What do you do if you have an issue with the professor?

AMY: If I have an issue with a professor, I tend to go to a program we have for, here at N.C. State. for first-gen students that I'm a part of, and they have, like, their own advisors and coaches and things like that. So, if I'm having a problem with my major and my faculty, things like that, I go to them.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Elyse?

ELYSE: Yeah, my professor? I don't really know. If I'm having a problem with a professor, yeah, I don't know.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: OK. So, the, the name that I mentioned, the ombuds – they used to call it the ombudsman or ombudswoman – they're supposed to help students resolve conflicts. So, if your class or your professor, you have an issue, be it grading or, or, you know, "I can't really get to my professor. We're not on the same page. We're either arguing ..." You go to those people, but the reason, you know, again, that I, I bring this up is because I honestly don't think students know where to go to with stress. OK? And, unfortunately, that then leads to depression. And as we're sitting here, there's an incident that just came out recently with some college students committing suicide.

In my experience, I've been at three different colleges: one very large college, one very small college, very liberal, Christian, and one very community, right, environment. At every one of those institutions, we've had a case of a suicide, and I say that to say that students will be students, students are students, stresses will be stresses, irrespective of where we are. Right? Small, big, again, I've seen it. I've seen it all, so I think this is very, very important. If there's one area that I really feel needs to be addressed for college, or for students, for you all to experience college, and it really has to be the stress.

OK, any other challenges that you all kind of have on your list that you think could be addressed? By the way, I'm gonna be talking to people, the experts, the counselors, and I'm gonna get to counselors here in a bit. But I wanna make sure that you had given me the, the challenges or the questions for me to ask them when I interview them. So, Amy, what else do you have? What can I do to make your college survival an experience and not a survival mode?

AMY: I think contain to, you know, teach study habits or skills. I know my first semesters it was a challenge to get that impact of, How should I study? Should I go to the library with a bunch of friends and study? Or are we gonna be talking the whole time and not get anything done? So, it was really learning how to study that has helped me, I feel like, each semester.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Elyse, I'm gonna ask the question a little different. What do you think are some of the challenges that your friends are going through? Do you have friends that, probably parents, I'm not even the picture. Do you have friends that are, are struggling

because they don't have food or room and board? What are some of the things that you're seeing in terms of challenges that you or your friends that haven't?

ELYSE: I think one could be transportation.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: OK.

ELYSE: I know a couple of friends who just aren't able to bring their cars here. I have a couple international friends, too, so that's different, and that's a, that's another thing I feel like that could be a whole topic in and of itself.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Absolutely.

ELYSE: International friends, like, from China, they haven't been able to go home during COVID, and that's been a struggle. Haven't seen their family for two years, which is a long time. And so, they've been working here and just dedicated to school solely. But they have a good community. But, yeah, I think I kind of got off topic.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: No, no.

ELYSE: OK, is that good?

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ELYSE: Yeah? So, international friends and then transportation. So, they don't really have their license either. I think also, when it comes to getting a job, too, it's a little hard for them. But, but then, even just not international, but I know some people that just don't have good transportation, so that can be kind of hard. Money is definitely a big thing, yeah.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Well, a couple of things that I'm, I'm taking from our little interview here is, of course, the peer pressure one was kind of a big one for me with some of the students and, you students, again, students trust to come talk to me, you know, who dealt with drugs or dealt with, unfortunately, there's some cases, some students are like, "Professor Chris, I don't know what to do. My friend is pregnant." Right? So, we have to deal with some of those issues as well, and I've, you know, again, I've helped students deal with that.

So, I think peer pressure is one of the big ones, you know, on my, my list of how to help students, and then the next one is, is stress, and we wanna make sure that it doesn't get to

the point where you, you feel like, “Oh, there’s nothing for me to do here.” We wanna make sure that you also know the people to talk to. I’ll be talking to counselors as well after, you know, some episodes later, as I, I do intend to, to do that. You all know where your counselors are on this campus? Would you even go to them, or have you ever been to a counselor?

AMY: I do know where they are on campus. I do know how to reach them, but I ...

O’RIODAN-ADJAH: You haven’t had the need.

AMY: I, I, that’s the thing. I prefer to, like, go off campus to get a counselor, and ...

O’RIODAN-ADJAH: Why is that, though? It’s very important, and I’ll, I’ll share, I’ll share with you why my students don’t want to go to the counselors. Yeah.

AMY: To me, it was more like I wanna separate this from school, like I don’t want this to be intertwined and an aspect. So, I feel like it was more personal to kind of separate the things like, “Oh, home over here. School over here.” And I don’t want to do counseling with school. Instead, just find a counselor off campus to deal with that on, like its own thing.

ELYSE: I actually don’t know where counselor’s office is.

O’RIODAN-ADJAH: OK.

ELYSE: But I feel like I could find their number on like the website, but I’ve never been for anything.

O’RIODAN-ADJAH: Right.

ELYSE: I feel like, honestly, it probably would help if I did go when it comes to like planning out my class. It’s something about that, too, just trying to figure that out. But yeah, I have not.

O’RIODAN-ADJAH: OK. All right, so my students ill not go to the counselors for several reasons. One is trust, right? They don’t feel like they could go to someone they don’t know, and that’s why I will be talking to someone, the counselors, to kind of help them as well to see how they could open their doors more or kind of engage students to feel comfortable going to them. Right? So that’s, that’s the other, that’s one thing.

Professors and conflicts, you all need to know, definitely, who to go talk to, to, to deal with that. I'm happy your professors, you can easily go to them. Always reach them if you want to. I'm also happy that you feel like they care, which is, which is good. Right? Unless, of course, you all are holding things back, don't wanna tell me things.

OK, very quickly, I'm gonna, I definitely will be ending with, you know, the depression issue and how to kind of help you all do that. But very, very quickly, we need to talk about balance. OK? Your academics is first. I know you are in a very big school here. There's always events going on. What are you all doing to balance work? You're able to do that? OK, school, work, fun. What are you, are you doing as far as balance goes? You think you're balancing OK?

AMY: Funny enough, someone told me, like, "It looks like you have a lot on your plate," but at times, it's like I can't really feel it because I'm just really going through it. And it's like, at the end of, like, whoa, I did all these things because I, like, have work-study, and then I also, apart from that work-study, I work with the, like, professor to do research, and then I even have a job off campus that I just go to, like, once a week. So, they're like tiny little things, but I guess they do kinda add up. But I just kind of cruise along with it, and then, like you said, try to find at least one fun activity per week to just know that, OK, from Monday to Thursday, I'm going to do all the work, school work that I can do. And on Friday, I'm gonna go watch a movie with friends or I'm gonna go eat somewhere. Like, just that one day for it.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Elyse, what do you do for fun?

ELYSE: Oh, we do different things. We watch movies.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: OK.

ELYSE: We were thinking about going to Charlotte, like we take a couple of quick trips together. Yeah, it, it changes, but yeah.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Right. So, mainly for students when it comes to balance, I think school is one. There are those who have to work, right, to kind of pay for food and everything else. So, that's the other thing you have to balance. And then you have social. I think it's important, by the way, that you all find some, some way to, to balance this out.

OK. Cheating, and I'm not talking about relationships. I'm talking about, do you have, is there peer pressure? I guess it falls under peer pressure. Do you have the edge to cheat, to

make your class work easy? Do you know friends that are indulging in that? My students tell me, "Professor Chris, I don't want to, but that's what everybody's doing." Right? "If I wanna get an edge, that's what I have to do." Do you all have the edge, or have you all been tempted to cheat in class whether on homework or exams? Has that ever crossed, you're so quiet, so I'm guessing the answer is no. It's like, "I thought about it, but I don't do it. So, I'm not gonna say, I'm not gonna say it." And sure, so, yes, go ahead, Amy.

AMY: I just think there's always that temptation, I feel, in the aspect because I feel like I just wanna know it's 100% right. Like, even if I, like, do it, and it's like that confidence is not enough to know that I won't fail. So, it's, like, that's intentional, like, "Oh well, if you double check, then maybe you're gonna get it," like it's gonna come out perfect in that aspect.

ELYSE: Yeah, I feel like there's a lot of online resources.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: OK.

ELYSE: And being the shift of, like, online, too, and in person, it just kind of, like, it comes to you all the time, But I feel like, cheating, this isn't the same as it might have been a couple of years ago, where you would have to, like, go out of your way to find this and that. And I feel, like, I kinda, for some people, they could use it to help them in a way, like help them learn more about certain things. But, but I don't, it's kind of hard because I, it would, I would need to know what someone defines as cheating because, with papers, there's plagiarism, and that's, that's obviously direct cheating. But then also, there's like actual open-note quizzes, right? And so, I just feel like the definition of what would be considered cheating in certain aspects, it's like, would need to be defined. But, yeah.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: OK. So what I'm gonna do is, I'm gonna try and kind of summarize this up very quickly to kind of see where I could help, right? So, we started with faculty, and I think that is all your professors. I always think that's the most important thing. I didn't ask the question as to who's your best friend or who you think should be your best friend. I honestly think your professors should be your best friend.

[Laughing]

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: I know it's, yes, and that is probably the same reaction that you get from most students. And the reason I say that is we talk about your first semester, the challenges you have during your first semester. That first semester is also the time that, if you could find one faculty that you could connect with, if that faculty doesn't teach your

classes anymore, but you know that's the one professor that I could go to your whole year in college, that professor will be there for you every time. OK? I need you to think about that a little bit. I'm gonna do a whole episode of the 10 things you need to experience college very well. A whole different episode where I'm just gonna highlight 10 points, and that will be one of them.

OK. So, very quickly, anything you would like for your professors to do in general for you to make sure that you have a good college experience? Because I'm going to be talking to faculty. I play the angel's advocate when I'm talking to my faculty in my episodes, so we can address this issue. Anything you will want your professors to do better so you get a, that's a better question. Anything you think you want your professors to do better so it, it will help you in your college experience?

AMY: I don't know. I feel like it's, because it's also how we kinda are to, or how I am. I'd feel like, I can feel like they're caring for me, or they can give me extensions or anything. But I'm not gonna go to them if I really, like, need anything. So, that's why I don't think there's actually one professor that I can say that I've built such a relationship that I can go back to them and say, like, "I need help in this."

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Right. Elyse?

ELYSE: Yeah. I feel like, when it comes to ...

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Anything they could do better? Anything ...

ELYSE: I could ...

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: They could do better to help you? Maybe you're doing great.

ELYSE: Maybe like, I feel like, if someone, let's say, if they haven't been to class or they're late often, instead of getting upset, I think it would be interesting if they actually sat down and met with them to try to figure out more. I would just, I would just say like intentionality and, like, if you want to know more about someone's, like, actual life, I guess they would have to, like, go out of their way to actually ask questions or, or maybe share stuff in their own life.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: OK.

ELYSE: I had a professor who recently, like the other day, he was able to share how someone in his family had passed away, and he was just, like, telling us how that might affect the way that he teaches on that day, you know, like his mood, basically. And I thought that that was something I'd never experienced from a professor. That's like actually sit, like being vulnerable in that way and being honest about why they might be feeling some type of way or why they might be different. I just feel like more open, being open on your side would probably make your students more open.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: And that's a very important thing you touched on that we didn't even touch on here is loss, right? You have a faculty that is that vulnerable to really tell you that. Students lose people and still have to balance, you know, come to school and pretend like everything's OK, right? So, we go back to who do you talk to, you know, being a student? You know, who did they talk to to make sure that they get the help they need to go through our school with, with loss. So, faculty, when I meet with faculty, sure I will, I will address those little issues that you've mentioned.

And then we got to peer pressure, and, again, I'm very happy that, you know, faith-based, so you know what to turn to, but most students don't, right? Most students don't. So, what, what do they do? Probably the best option here is to find the counselors, right? Find somebody to talk to. I like the fact that, if you have a friend that has kind of the same system, it helps, right? Yeah, your friends are always gonna be the first one to know what's happening to you. And they will provide some suggestions, and I hope those suggestions are good suggestions for you all.

OK. All right. And then we got to management, balancing things out. Your academics is always first, and I know you all prioritize that. So, that's also very good. And please stop me as I go through this if there's anything else that I'm missing. I'm just trying to kind of summarize, basically, very quickly. So, you all do very good balancing and try to find time for yourself as well. It kind of helps with the, the stress levels.

And I'll probably will end on this is, don't stress. College is really meant to be an experience. Find the resources that you all have. You all have a lot of resources, and, if not, then, write a goal for this year to make sure that you know where those resources are and where to go to.

And whatever you do, don't cheat. Your professors don't like that. It's like a, this switch for them. Whatever trust they have for you, the instant they find that out, and no matter what you do, it's very difficult to gain that trust back from them.

ELYSE: I do have something to add to that.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Yes.

ELYSE: It's also a little different, too, when it comes in my major because we just have few tests in Art and Design, at least. So, there's like, like there's open-book quizzes outside of that, in other classes. But when it comes to Art and Design, it's like you either have a creative idea or you don't, right? Or you either create something or you just don't. Like there's no way you could, or it would be obvious if you take someone else's idea that. So, when it comes to that, it's like there's no way you can get by with that.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Amy, how are you doing?

AMY: I'm doing good, just taking it in.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: That's good. That's good. I was hoping to be taking it in from you, so, but that's good. Anything you wanna say, comment on to make your college life or your college experience better? As we wrap up here, you wanna add?

AMY: I think kind of like what you mentioned then throughout I just changed that mindset that you do gotta experience this cause, right, it's gonna end. It's gonna come to an end, so just changing that mindset out.

ELYSE: I think I do have one question.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Yes.

ELYSE: This is kind of different.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: Well, I should, I should actually have given you an opportunity. Let's do that. Yeah. What questions, I'm never gonna pretend. I'm still a professor, so questions, yes.

ELYSE: Yeah. So, outside of college, because I feel like the, the, the demands aren't really gonna go anywhere. It'll just be different kind of demands. What would you do with, like, when it comes to needing counsel or needing advice when outside of college cause you won't really have those resources.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: OK.

ELYSE: I feel like the same thing, like how do you, I don't know, get, make things better, right?

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: So, usually, what I tell students is, when you are in college, when you're in school, there are three things that I need you to remember so far as help goes. The very first person, of course, is gonna be your professor or your faculty or your teachers, right, because they're the immediate ones to talk to. But sometimes there's a limit to what they can do. Because if you go into your professor with, "I'm stressing out. I'm, I don't know what to do." Right? They might not even be able to handle that. But they are in a position to direct you to go see someone. Usually, they will say the counselors, OK?

So, so as far as your question, when you go outside, yes, well, you graduate, yeah, you graduate now, your, your resources are actually also gonna be external. There are external counselors, right?

ELYSE: Yeah.

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: You know the therapy, the therapist, you know? But I like to approach it from the faith-based, and I'm, I know you know that is the very easiest one and the, personally for me, the most reliable one to go to because you do have people surrounding you with that that can help you. But no, there are counselors off campus. There are counselors, actually, Amy said, "I like to do my counseling off campus." So, she's already started that process. But yeah, there's definitely help off, off campus.

AMY: I guess one question is what, like a professor, do you think, how can students feel that comfortable to come to you with things?

O'RIODAN-ADJAH: That's a very good question. So, students will have to trust you, ultimately, and you as a faculty, you're doing two things. One is you absolutely have to care, one. If you do care, and you honestly do care, and I repeat that again, students will see that in you, and they will come to you now.

Students have a two-step process. This is personal from observation. Students will come to you first to assess your caring ability. If they realize that you care, that is when they transition to trust, and the trust is gonna come with them telling you something and nobody

else hearing about it. That's called confidentiality, right? And for me, I think, over the years, that's, I still have students that have graduated five, 10 years ago that still stay in touch with me. And also, that's why I feel like I'm very honored to be in this position to do this here because I honestly want to help. I definitely want to help students' college experience be better, right?

So, that is how, there is not a technique. There's not a strategy. It's something that has to evolve naturally. You the professor absolutely have to care for students to know that you care so they can trust you. Sounds very simple, but it's not, because I know a lot of professors, or I know a lot of students would not go to their professors for anything because that is not there. And case in point, that is, when I have my students, and I say, "OK, you know, I'm gonna help you, but there are counselors for you to go to." There's that hesitation, right? Because they don't see the counselors, don't know them, so they don't know where the caring is gonna come from, let alone the trust.

But you all have told me you have professors, faculty that you think care. That's the very first step. Take it from there and see if you could trust them, and if the professor really does care, that will not be a problem.

Well, that is the end of Let's Talk Ed with Professor Chris. I do promise and hope to take this next step to talk to the people that we talked about indirectly, right, to see how they can make college life experience good. Thank you all for being on Let's Talk Ed with Professor Chris.

AMY: Thank you.

ELYSE: Thank you.