

Ethical Professor #24: **Burnout**
May 2014

Toward the end of a long career—or even at the end of a tough semester—there may be times when it is harder to motivate oneself to engage one’s students in a vital and creative way. At times it might even seem as though the effort “isn’t worth it.” When these feelings arise, it may be a sign of **burnout**, a common experience in helping professions such as teaching.

Cary Cherniss, burnout researcher and author of [*Beyond Burnout*](#) (Routledge), identified the following factors that might lead to instructor burnout:

- **Faculty frustration with student lack of adequate preparation** in basic skills areas, as well as students with mental health issues that interfere with learning difficult subject-matter concepts.
- **Lack of autonomy** when faced with increasing requirements imposed by state legislatures or others who are not actually in the classroom.
- **Difficult student behavior** that can make each day more challenging.
- **Lack of support and interpersonal conflict** that may arise from flexible teaching schedules that isolate us from our colleagues and make it difficult to connect when differences need to be discussed.
- **Boredom** arising from standardization of curriculum.

We have to be **aware** of whether we have symptoms of burnout--and **accept** our predicament without blaming ourselves—before we can take **action** to turn things around. Another researcher in this area, Christine Maslach, has developed a self-test to help faculty become aware of symptoms of burnout. The path to her **Burnout Self Test** starts here:

<http://www.mindtools.com/stress/Brn/BurnoutSelfTest.htm>

From that page, click on “Burnout” in the Stress Management Tools box. If you have trouble accessing this, there are screenshots at the end of this posting that may help.

Burnout can be an institutional problem, because many of the factors that can cause burnout are out of any individual instructor’s control. Nevertheless, the negativity that burnout produces can be contagious.

By the same token, an environment of mutual support, professionalism, and collaboration—where awareness of burnout is “on the table” as a situation requiring compassion— can help individuals and departments re-create a positive environment in which learning is enhanced.

The District can provide some limited help if you or a colleague are personally experiencing burnout. A limited number of free counseling sessions are offered through the [E.A.S.E. program](#). Several flyers are available on this site as well—including one called “[Coping with burnout](#).”

Please do not respond to this email. Comments may be made in the eCompanion course **FAC 101**, in the threaded discussion under the Faculty Forum unit.

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Winnie Kakonge (student rep)

Steven Kaufmann
Marco Llaguno
Ming Lu
Gary Ortega

Additional help in accessing the Burnout self test is available on the next page.

Click to get to the [Burnout Self Test Link](#), which takes you to a page with this box:

Stress Management Techniques

 Browse by Category

Action-Based Strategies	Relaxation and Sleep
Perception-Based Strategies	Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem
Coping Strategies	Anger Management
Managing Performance Stress	Burnout
Happiness and Well-Being	

click on Burnout, which will bring you to a page where you can take the test. It looks like this:

Burnout




Burnout Self-Test +
Are You at Risk?



Avoiding Burnout +
Maintaining a Healthy, Successful Career



Recovering From Burnout +
Finding Passion for Your Role Again

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