

2026  
ASSESSMENT  
SHOWCASE

STEM AND STRESS: IMPLEMENTING DE-STRESSOR  
ACTIVITIES IN HIGH-STRESS CLASSES

Social Sciences and Natural Sciences · Fall 2025

Project Leaders: Shanda Vidmar and Tracy Williams

PROBLEM

Students in high-stakes STEM classes often experience elevated anxiety that negatively impacts test-taking abilities and overall academic performance. Traditional class formats rarely incorporate stress management techniques, leaving students without tools to regulate their stress responses during critical assessment periods.

PLAN

This interdisciplinary collaboration between Social Sciences and Natural Sciences addresses student stress in STEM courses through brief, evidence-based interventions. The project implements 5-minute de-stressor activities—including guided meditation, coloring, and reflective journaling—designed to help students manage test anxiety and improve academic performance. Students’ test scores will be evaluated and compared with survey results.

Example of a daily schedule

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
8:00 AM	Breakfast/ Get ready	Breakfast/ Get ready	Breakfast/ Get ready	Breakfast/ Get ready	Breakfast/ Get ready	Breakfast/ Get ready	Breakfast/ Get ready
9:00 AM	Travel to School	History Prep	Ameri. Lit. HW	Can. Lit. Hw	Can. Lit. Hw	Open Study	Open Study
10:00 AM	Can. Lit. Prep	Ameri. Lit Prep	Travel to School	Hist. HW	Can. Lit. Hw	Open Study	Open Study
11:00 AM	Poli. Sci	Phil. Prep	Poli. Sci.	Break + Lunch	Hist. HW	Open Study	Open Study
12:00 PM	Poli. Sci	Travel to School	Poli. Sci.	Ameri. Lit. Hw	Break + Lunch	Travel to Work	Travel to Work
1:00 PM	Can. Lit.	History	Phil.	Phil. HW	Hist. HW	Work	Work
2:00 PM	Can. Lit.	History	Phil.	Break + Snack	Phil. HW	work	Work
3:00 PM	Can. Lit.	History	Phil.	Can. Lit. Prep	Phil. HW	Work	Work
4:00 PM	Travel /Lunch	Ameri. Lit.	Travel /Lunch	Poli. Sci.	Poli. Sci.	Work	Work
5:00 PM	Free Time	Ameri. Lit.	Free Time	Hist. HW	Poli. Sci.	Work	Work
6:00 PM	History Prep	Ameri. Lit.	Poli. Sci HW	Break + Dinner	Ameri. Lit. HW	Work	Work
7:00 PM	Poli. Sci Prep	Travel Home +Dinner	Phil. HW	Ameri. Lit. HW	Ameri. Lit. HW	Travel Home	Travel Home
8:00 PM	Free Time	Free Time	Free Time	Phil. HW	Free Time	Free Time	Free Time
9:00 PM	Free Time	Phil. Prep	Free Time	Free Time	Free Time	Free Time	Free Time
10:00 PM	To Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep
Key	Self-Care	Communting	In Class	Free Time	HW/ Study	Work	

ASSESSMENT ACTIVITY

- Brief interventions: Short 5-minute destressing activities that don’t disrupt instructional time were incorporated into CHE1111: General College Chemistry I
- Evidence-based techniques: Students engaged in a specific activity each week, such as meditation, scheduling, and journaling—each with research-backed stress reduction benefits
- Student-centered: Activities were selected based on accessibility and ease of implementation, and students are introduced to each destressing activity with instruction on how and why the activity helps to reduce stress
- Data-driven: Pre/post surveys were administered with each week’s destressing activity, and we hope to also conduct test score analysis to measure the impact on performance



Students meditating in class

RESULTS AND DATA

- Survey responses indicate that students found value in these activities:
- Most Effective Activity: **Deep Breathing** was selected by **100%** of students.
  - Impact on Focus/Mood/Stress: **80%** reported some improvement; **20%** saw no change.
  - Usefulness Beyond Class: **80%** believe these techniques could help in other settings.
  - Likelihood of Continued Use: **40%** plan to use techniques regularly, **20%** occasionally, **40%** maybe.
  - Student Quote: *“Thank you for focusing on our mental health.”*

Example of a coloring activity



CLOSING THE LOOP and NEXT STEPS

- Students’ test scores and survey results will be analyzed to assess the value of the activity. Based on our findings, some additional next steps may include:
- Expanding implementation to additional STEM courses
  - Conducting a longitudinal study comparing semester-to-semester outcomes
  - Developing training materials for part-time instructors
  - Creating a student resource guide for independent stress management