

## Chapter 7

# Creating Space for Care: Sustaining the Emotional Self in Higher Education

**Theresa Redmond**

*Appalachian State University, USA*

**Jennifer Luetkemeyer**

*Appalachian State University, USA*

**Jewel Davis**

*Appalachian State University, USA*

**Peaches Hash**

*Appalachian State University, USA*

**Tempestt Adams**

*Appalachian State University, USA*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter describes how a community of practice explored arts-based research and expression to examine issues of inequity in education. Through visual journaling, the authors found growth within their scholarly practices and care towards their emotional selves at work. Using a hybrid of self-study methodology, arts-based research, and narrative inquiry, the authors examine the outcomes of their work, illuminating how visual journaling may be used to grow one's scholarly teaching. Ultimately, the authors found their process was generative, reflective, and one that serves to generate conversations about emotional workspaces in higher education. Further, this chapter provides practical guidance for readers seeking to develop communities of self-care through visual journaling in higher education.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Academic life in the twenty-first century is increasingly complicated by rising stress and pressures. Higher education faculty are required to address a complex range of colliding demands, including larger course loads, bigger class sizes, and mounting competition for student enrollments. Budget cuts have exacerbated systemic inequities, while also creating unhealthy competition surrounding teacher quality, research, and publishing as faculty are required to do more with less support and resources. An adverse political climate targeted at tearing down higher education in combination with the rising cost of college threatens to devalue public regard for a liberal arts education. Within this landscape, achieving a work-life balance is a substantial challenge. Moreover, academics in the twenty-first century are besieged by a constant stream of tasks communicated via email and other digital tools, making the elusive work-life balance even more tenuous.

At the same time, the benefits of academic life—namely autonomy in scholarly-teaching and dedication to one's subject or field—create the context for exploitation as faculty are inclined to spend more time engaged in work because they care deeply about it. Care for students and the need to support students' emotional well-being as part of teaching is also increasing. For example, a significant number of people experience trauma in childhood, the effects of which may follow them into their higher education experiences (Souers, 2016). Likewise, faculty and staff members may suffer their own trauma in the form of overextension and burnout (Shanafelt et al., 2009). Together, these myriad factors have dire implications for the health and well-being of the emotional self at work in higher education, including students, faculty, staff, and others.

Progressively, pockets of faculty attuned to issues of health and well-being are raising awareness regarding the value of creating healthier communities of scholarly practice in higher education. The purpose of this chapter is to share one such community of faculty from different fields and at various ranks who have come together to engage in self-care and scholarly practice through visual journaling. The chapter discusses the origins of the cluster and the ways the authors have invited care and creativity into their shared and individual practices—including in teaching, scholarship, and other aspects of their jobs and lives. Using a hybrid of self-study methodology, arts-based research, and narrative inquiry, the authors examine the outcomes of their work, illuminating how visual journaling may be used to grow one's scholarly-teaching and create space for emotional care in academia. Further, this chapter provides practical guidance for readers seeking to develop communities of self-care through visual journaling in higher education.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **About our Cluster**

As faculty working at a large, regional comprehensive university in the southeast, the authors have found themselves spread thin due to spiraling demands for involvement in all aspects of university life, including onerous expectations to engage in student and faculty recruitment and retention in a time of budget cuts and program prioritization. These new expectations are in addition to the more traditional demands of the academic triad, namely teaching, research, and service, which themselves are underfunded and undersupported. Further, the authors have observed mounting stress in student populations as well. The

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