

Building Resiliency (for Gen Z) through Student Conduct

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“Resiliency is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.”

(American Psychological Association, 2018)

“Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress” (American Psychological Association, 2018). Helping students build resilience while in college should be one of the cornerstone goals for all higher education professionals. However, student conduct hearing officers and investigators are also tasked with the role and responsibility to promote the safety and honor of an institution by addressing policy and campus climate concerns. Students who violate policy and cause campus issues are likely to experience some level of adversity and stress. Therefore, the student conduct process may be the best place to engage in resiliency education.

Generation Z, our current and future generation of college students, have experienced intimate details about traumatic world events (i.e. 9/11 or the economic downturn in 2008) through social media which has, in turn, instilled great fear and worry in these students (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). This makes our current college students not only more prone to anxiety, but they also have a decreased ability to bounce back from any stress or trauma they might face in their experiences while on our campuses. As a result, when a student violates a campus policy and is called to a conduct hearing, this process could be a developmental experience they do not have the prior behavior or knowledge to engage in. As conduct officers, the guiding principles of autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, and fidelity, should be considered in all steps of the conduct process (Association for Student Conduct Administration, 2017). This means we should provide equitable services to students unless there is a risk to self or others and demonstrate trustworthy conduct to build connections toward growth and development. Therefore, we cannot equitably and fairly help our Gen Z students successfully engage in a growth-minded student conduct process when that process has not been developed with them or their ability to be resilient in mind.

The American Psychological Association’s *The Road to Resilience* (2018) suggests a few simple ways to help all individuals build resilience which can easily be applied to the conduct process:

- Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems
- Accept that change is a part of living



- Move toward your goals
- Take decisive action
- Look for opportunities for self-discovery
- Nurture a positive viewpoint of yourself
- Keep things in perspective
- Take care of yourself

As a conduct officer or fraternity/sorority professional, we can use the data and research just discussed. Consider employing some of the following suggestions to help students build resilience while maintaining important ethical principles and practices:

- Help students understand meeting for a conduct hearing is not an insurmountable experience. Provide positive assurances in all communications from the beginning to the end of the process that this is a problem the student can handle. This can occur through email contact, in person, and in follow-up.
- Allow opportunities for students to “engage in hands-on learning opportunities in which they can immediately apply what they learn to real life” as part of sanction options. Generation Z students often prefer this method because it shows them that the concept they are learning has a broader applicability (Seemiller & Grace, 2017).
- Have students set attainable goals for themselves and implement small accomplishments as they move towards their goals in order to feel more in control. Generation Z students are seeking opportunities for self-exploration of their values and passions in order to set themselves up for meaningful future careers (Seemiller & Grace, 2017).
- Provide direct opportunities for students to engage in restorative practices rather than allowing them to distance themselves from their problems or stress (i.e. deciding their sanctions with you, repairing a harmed relationship, providing community service).
- Acknowledge that “developing technology, drafting a business plan, or accessing startup funding may align with how Generation Z students see themselves engaging in and affecting their communities” and consider how you can provide these social change opportunities through creative sanctioning (Seemiller & Grace, 2017).
- Allow students to engage in educational opportunities in an individual setting, whether that be through watching a video or doing a training module. Gen Z students thrive in this setting and want to individually impact change on their communities. This type of individual accomplishment can also help build self-confidence and more positive self-feelings.

- As appropriate, encourage students through sanctioning methods to take care of themselves through personal engagement, relaxation, exercise, meditation, and other practices. This may be more applicable for students of concern but is a helpful reminder that there are underlying issues within individuals which often cause violations.
- Build rapport and help students to keep their situation in perspective by sharing appropriate comparative stories with them or, if applicable, share your own personal experiences.

Allowing Gen Z students the opportunity to build resilience in the student conduct process can be a transformative experience for those students who may be on a path of difficulty. By treating them equitably and providing these types of self-growth opportunities, we can help this innovative and entrepreneurial generation develop the inter and intrapersonal skills they need to be successful far beyond college.

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Isabelle Jeffries is currently the Fraternity and Sorority Life Coordinator at Colorado School of Mines where she oversees the entire program including risk management, education, and advising. Isabelle comes from residence life where she worked as an Area Coordinator at the University of Montana and for residence life at Ball State University where she completed her master's degree in Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education. Isabelle is interested and passionate in the student conduct process in higher education, but in her free time she enjoys distance running and exercising, reading, and exploring the beauty of Colorado's mountains!

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