

# UNCOMPLICATING STUDENT SUCCESS



# Dr. Thomas Dickson



- **25+ years of higher education experience**
  - Director Ohio Strong Start in Science, Ohio Department of Higher Education
  - Former Assistant Vice Provost, Assistant Dean, Director, & Academic Advisor
  - Taught over 78 courses - undergraduate and graduate
  - **LEGO® Serious Play® facilitator**
- **Education**
  - **B.A. Psychology, Arizona State University**
  - **M.Ed. Counseling & Student Affairs, Northern Arizona University**
  - **Ed.D. Post-Secondary Administration, Arizona State University**

# My Path

## Psych & Counseling

- BA Psychology
- MEd Counseling
- EdD HigherEd

## Advising

- Advising
- Career Counseling
- Transfer
- First Year Experience

## Dissertation

- Duties, Austerity
- Burnout

## Leadership and Change

- First-Gen
- Impostor Syndrome
- Institutional Transformation

## Play and Friction



# Play

**Work hard now, and...**

**All work and no play,...**



# WHY PLAY?

- **Explore, take risks, & try new things**
- **Test boundaries**
- **Helps us learn**
- **Socialize & build connections**
- **Enhances creativity**
- **Stress relief**



# Rules for Work

***"Out of clutter, find simplicity.  
From discord, find harmony.  
In the middle of difficulty  
lies opportunity."***



*Albert Einstein*



# Rules for Work

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Discord



Stress

# Discord & Harmony

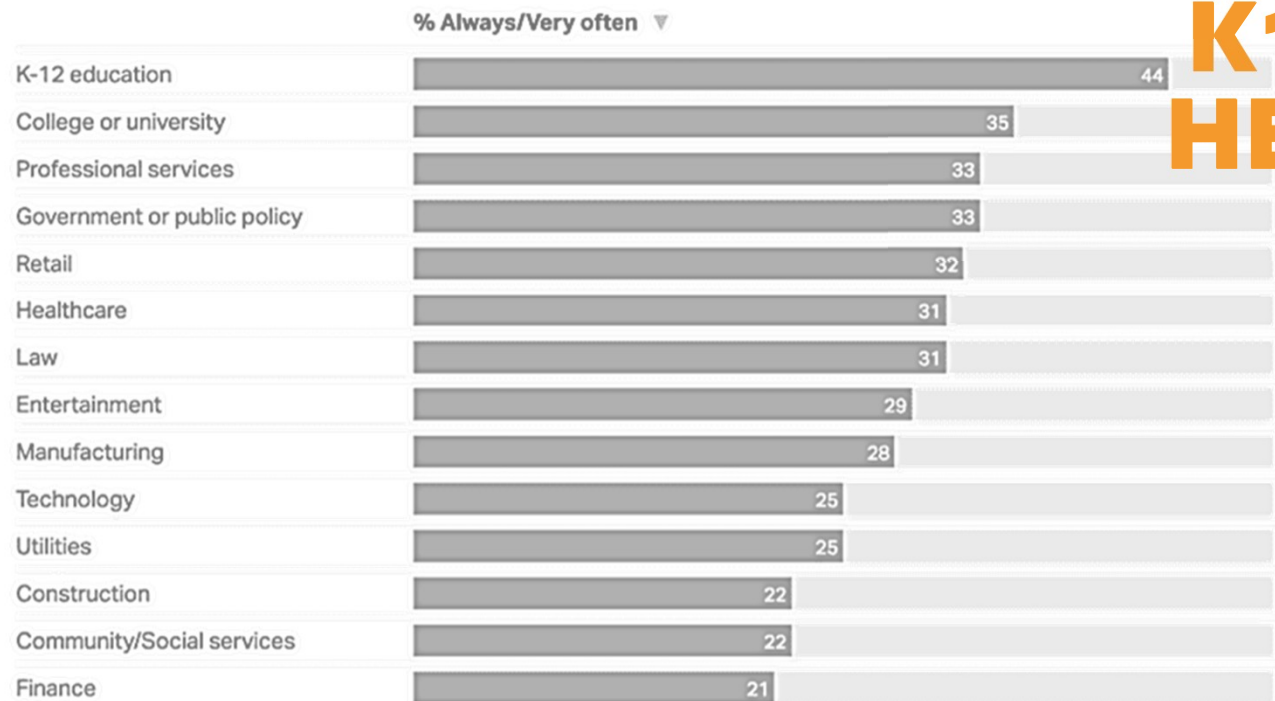


Yerkes-Dodson (1908), Freudenberg (1974), Edelwich (1980), & Maslach (1982)

# Discord & Harmony

## U.S. Workers' Burnout Rates by Industry, 2022

Please indicate how often the following is true of your job: You feel burned out at work.



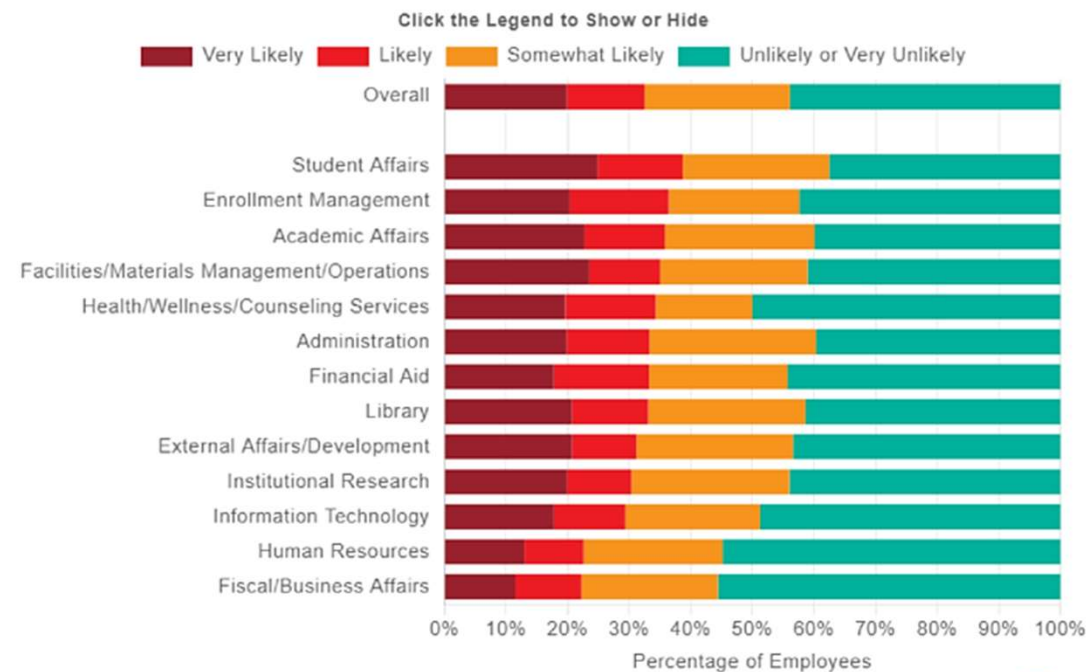
**K12 = 44%**  
**HED = 35%**

# Discord & Harmony

- **K-12 has a 22% voluntary turnover rate**
  - 87% report working more than 40 hours a week
  - 33% looking to leave role
- **Higher Education 14% voluntary turnover rate**
  - 50% report working more than 40 hours a week
  - 56% looking to leave role

2023 Employee Retention Survey

Likelihood of Looking for Other Employment Within the Next 12 Months



# Discord & Harmony

***“Everything's not awesome  
Things can't be awesome all of the time  
It's an unrealistic expectation  
But that **doesn't** mean we shouldn't try  
To make everything awesome  
In a less idealistic kind of way  
We should **maybe** aim for not bad  
'Cause **not bad** right now would be real great”***

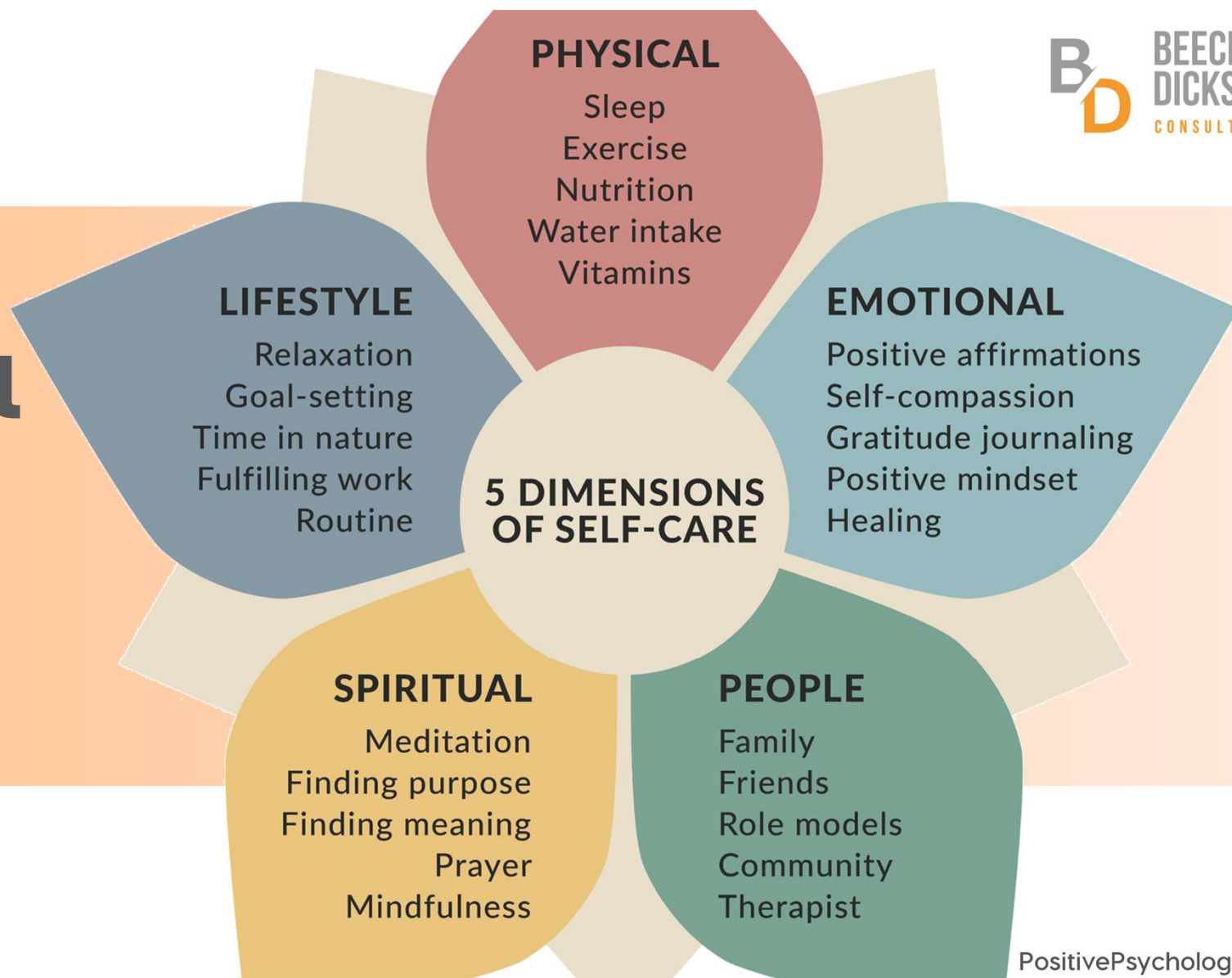


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# Personal Care Actions



# EXERCISE **Discord & Harmony**

**Closing the Stress Cycle: “Physical activity is the single most efficient strategy for completing the stress responses cycle.”**

## • **Personal Exercise One: Breathing**

- Breathe in for five seconds,
- hold for five,
- exhale for ten,
- pause for five.
- Do this 3 times.



*Nagoski, E. & Nagoski, A. (2019).*



# EXERCISE **Discord & Harmony**

**Closing the Stress Cycle: “Physical activity is the single most efficient strategy for completing the stress responses cycle.”**

## • **Personal Exercise Two: Grounding**

- Slowly count down from ten in your head
- Try to recognize each of your five senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste)
- Ground yourself in this moment
- Slow your other thoughts



*Nagoski, E. & Nagoski, A. (2019).*



# Discord & Harmony



# Discord & Harmony

$$B = f(P, E)$$

Behavior is a function of the **person** and the **environment**



# Discord & Harmony

## Personal

- **Self-care** gets most attention
- Orgs like it – **easy/quick**
- Change is **limited in scope** and longevity
- **Impacts mostly ourselves**

## Environmental

- **Systems** get little attention
- Orgs dislike this focus – **harder to change systems**
- Change is **broad in scope**
- **Impacts** ourselves and others, **those after us**



# The Owl

- Owl image
- Stress lowers performance
- Toward positive

*Nagoski, E. & Nagoski, A. (2019)*



# The Owl

# What are your owls?



# EXERCISE Owls

- **Build symbols and metaphors for stressors**

- Focus on those you think should & can change

- Share your build with your table at the end





Fight



Fight

**B  
D** BEECH  
DICKSON  
CONSULTING

# DO SOMETHING!

**Do anything.**  
**Care is not passive.**  
**Close the cycle.**



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*Albert Einstein*

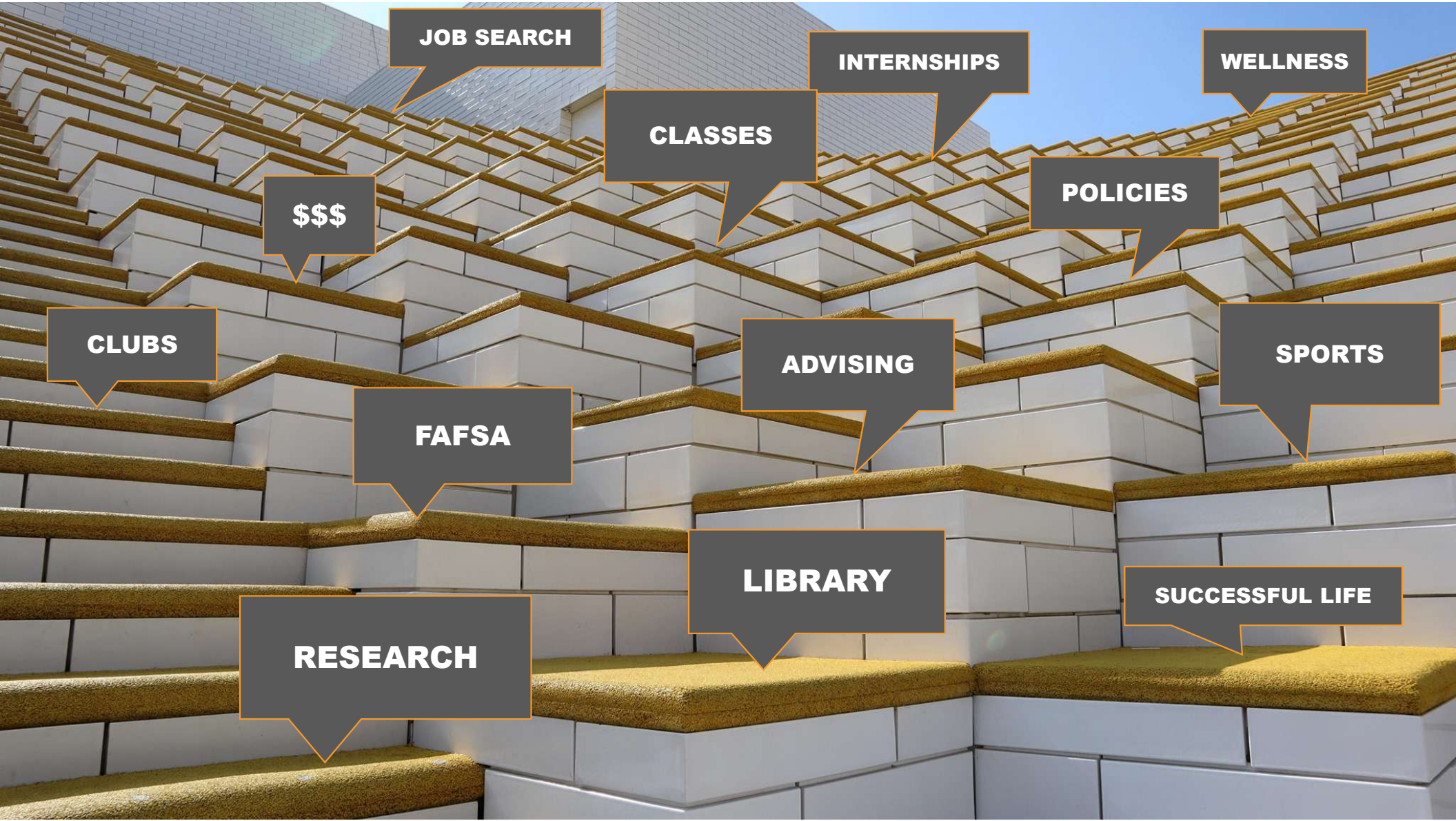
# OBJECT IN MOTION



*Newton*

# FIRST DAY





**JOB SEARCH**

**INTERNSHIPS**

**WELLNESS**

**CLASSES**

**POLICIES**

**\$\$\$**

**CLUBS**

**ADVISING**

**SPORTS**

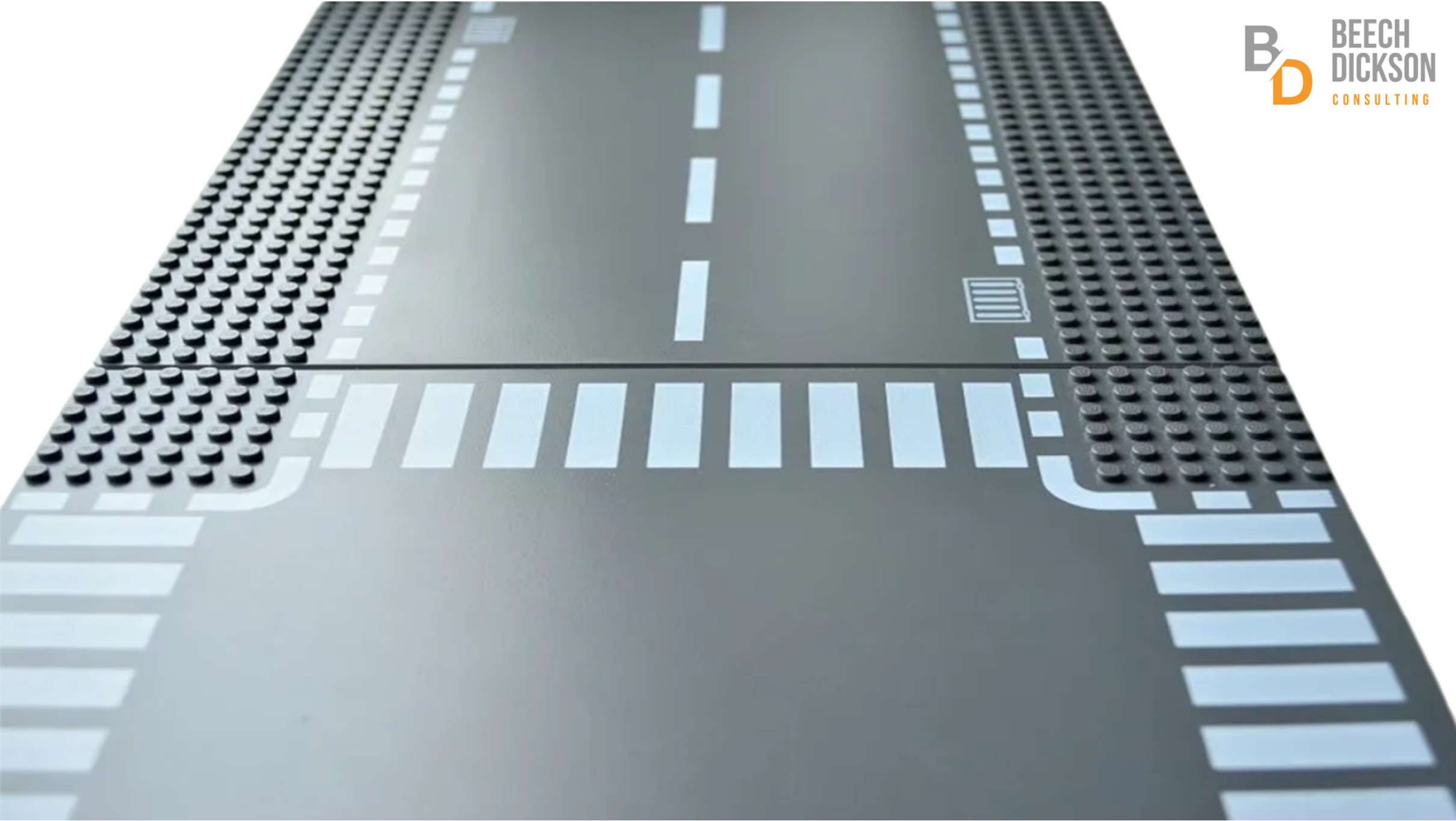
**FAFSA**

**LIBRARY**

**SUCCESSFUL LIFE**

**RESEARCH**





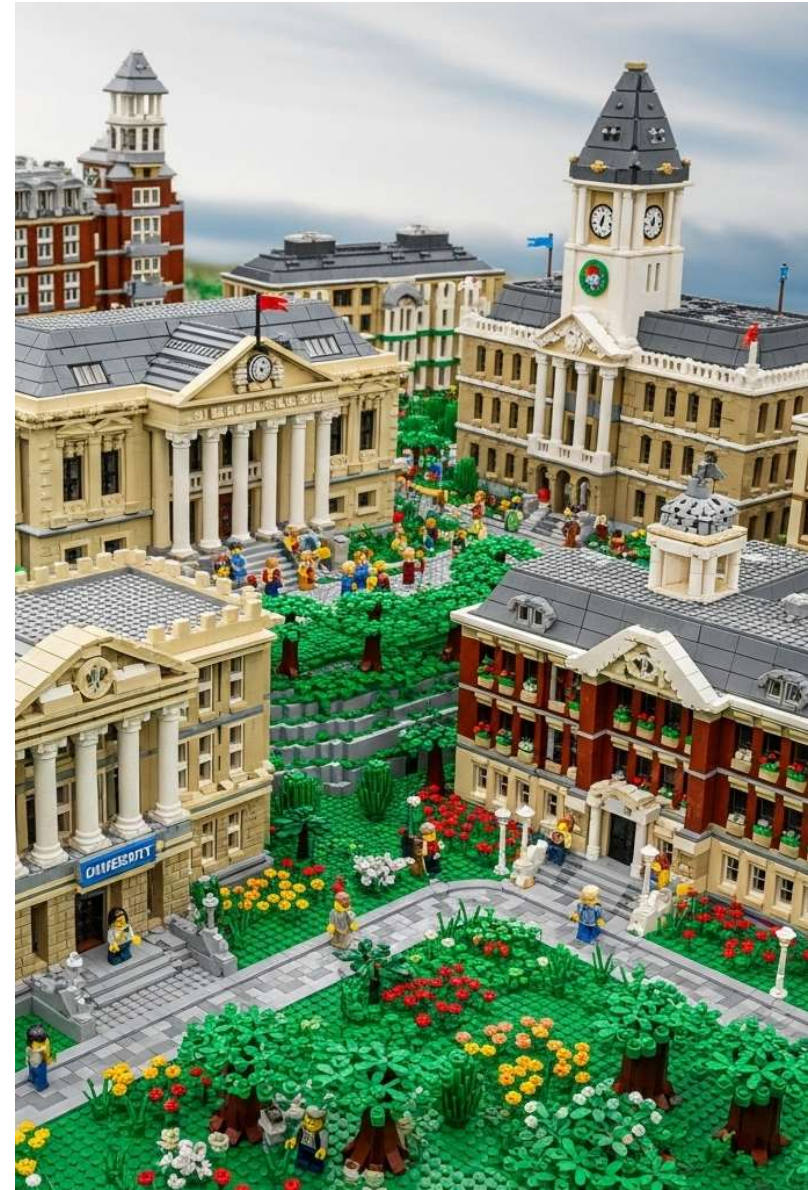
# Difficulty

- We all have limits, energy for problem solving and learning
- High stress takes away energy and reduces focus

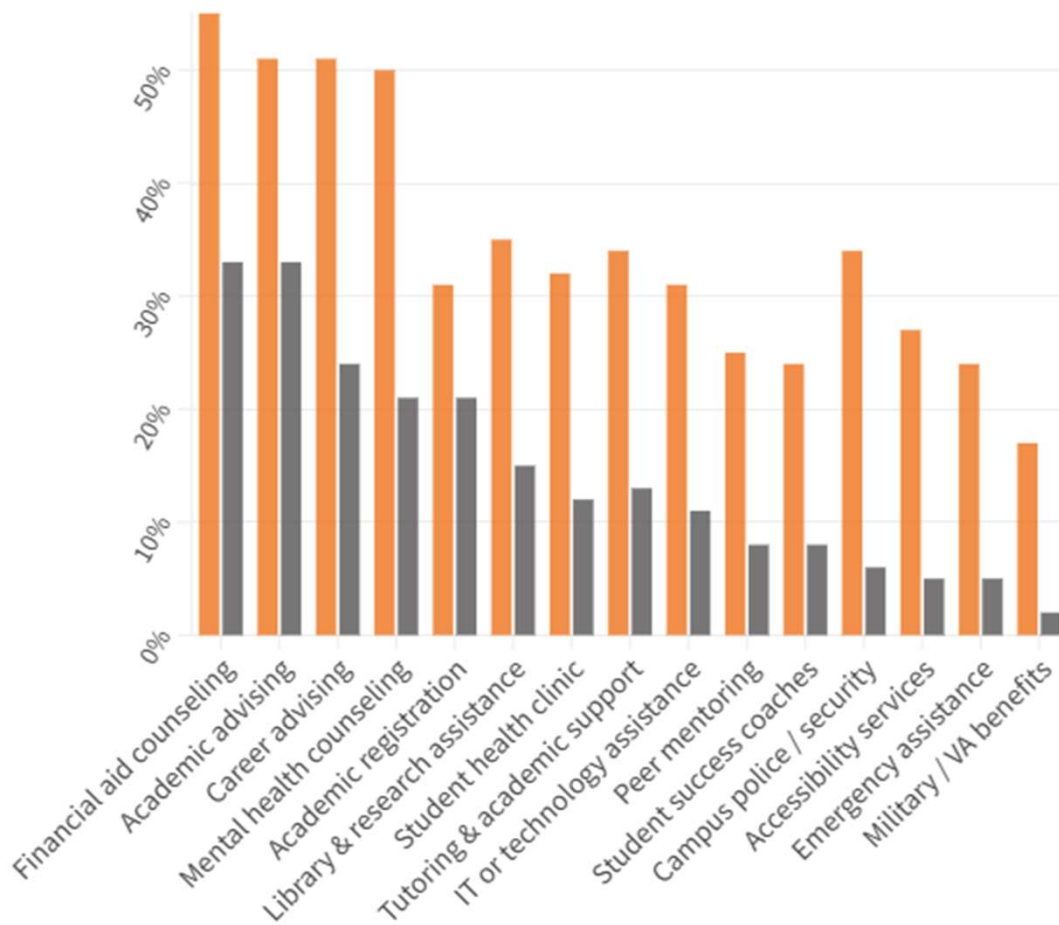


# Difficulty

- High stress makes it **harder to learn** new information
- Decisions are harder when you have **too many choices** or items to track



# Difficulty



## College Student Awareness & Use of Resources

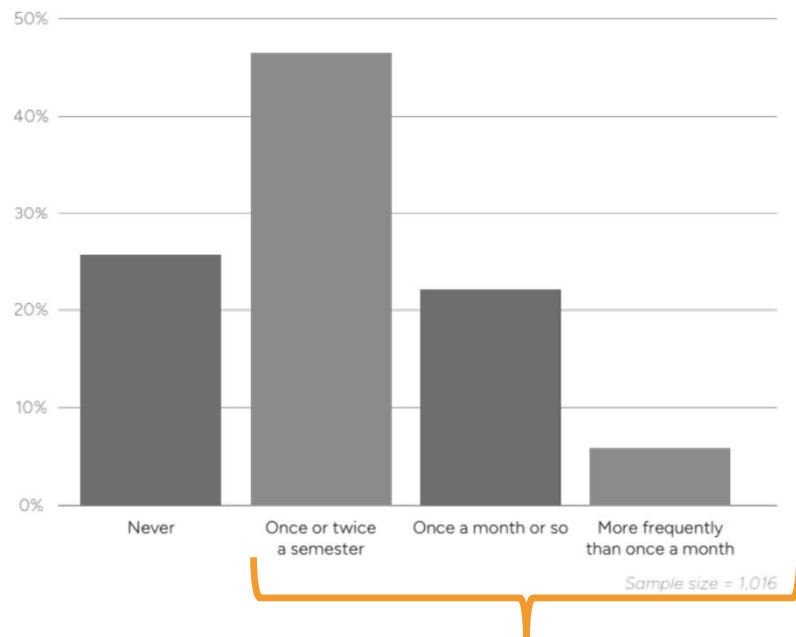
Resource	Aware	Use
Career Counseling	<b>51%</b>	24%
Academic Advising	<b>51%</b>	33%
Academic Tutoring	34%	<b>13%</b>
Library & Research Aid	35%	<b>15%</b>
Financial Aid Counseling	<b>55%</b>	33%
Peer Mentoring	25%	<b>8%</b>
Success Coaches	24%	<b>8%</b>
Mental Health	<b>50%</b>	21%
Health Center	32%	<b>12%</b>
Disability Services	27%	<b>5%</b>

(Listening to Learners, 2024 - Tyton Partners)

# Difficulty

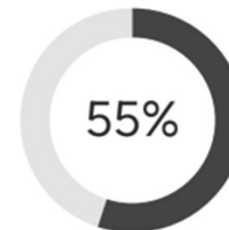
Deadline struggles and retention risks

How frequently do you miss deadlines on assignments or forget upcoming exams?



**74% are missing assignments**

Academic overwhelm: The need for more support



feel overwhelmed by the number of things to keep track of at university

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Albert Einstein

# PROBLEM?





FRICTION

**B D** BEECH  
DICKSON  
CONSULTING

CLASSES  
TUITION  
POLICIES  
CLASSES  
CAREER  
CLASSES  
TUITION  
CLASSES  
CAREER  
CLASSES  
TUITION  
CLASSES  
CAREER  
CLASSES  
TUITION  
CLASSES  
CAREER

# UNCOMPLICATING • *adj*

*/ uhn-KAHM-pluh-key-thing /*

- 1. **simplify**, make not difficult to understand, do, use, or deal with;*
- 2. removing or **reducing complication**;*



# Clutter & Simplicity

**‘[A university is] a series of individual faculty entrepreneurs held together by a common grievance over parking.’**

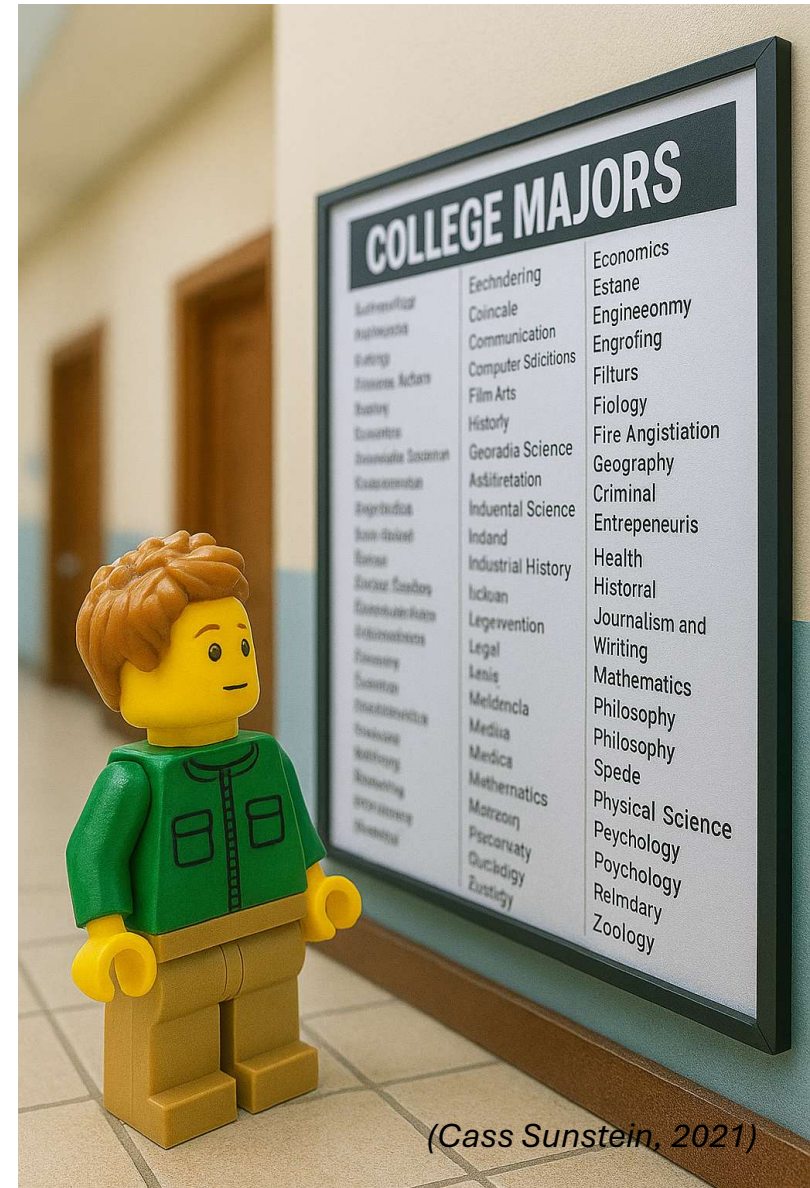


*Clark Kerr, Chancellor of the University of California (1958-67)*



# Simplify

- Too many choices, steps, wait times, deadlines, processes
- Decreases our usage of resources and supports
- Cumulative Cost Neglect
  - Little things add up!





**FRICTION**



**AUDITS**

# Clutter & Simplicity

**50% Reduction  
in Financial Aid  
Processes = \$ +2,200 per student**



# Clutter & Simplicity

## Wellness, Environment

### Reduced extraneous impacts:

Smells, sounds, quiet  
Temperature, light  
Air quality  
Study spaces  
Relaxation/social  
spaces  
Cleanliness

## Learning & Academics

**Clear** personal &  
career goals  
Academic **connections**  
to goals  
**Balanced** workloads –  
and courses (not all  
hardest ones at same  
time)  
Assignments and goals  
align  
Grades **align** with effort  
- logical  
Accessibility of  
academic assistance  
– **embedded** in  
courses

## Processes

Clear, **accessible**  
Financial Aid  
**Smooth** navigation of  
resources  
Paperwork level  
**corresponds with**  
**importance**  
Unexplained/long waits  
Multiple steps,  
versions, approvers  
**Multiple systems,**  
sites, sources – too  
many screens

## Engagement

**Invited** to engage  
Networking  
opportunities  
Clear academic  
planning  
**Early engagement** with  
major  
Accessible career  
exploration  
Career development  
**embedded in**  
**courses (and**  
**articulated as such)**






# Clutter & Simplicity

- **Show the math!**
  - Time saved for students and personnel
- **Don't be Additive!**
  - Don't fill saved time with more tasks!
  - Freed time = thinking, more w/ students, & **finding more friction and simplifying!**



# Clutter & Simplicity

**“A 5% reduction in  
sludge can equate to  
a 10% increase  
in productivity”**

A decorative graphic consisting of two overlapping diagonal lines, one grey and one orange, pointing towards the top-left corner.

*(Cass Sunstein, 2021)*

# Steps



**Beech Dickson  
Student Success Sludge Audit**



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**BE CURIOUS! PLAY!**



**THANK  
YOU!**

