

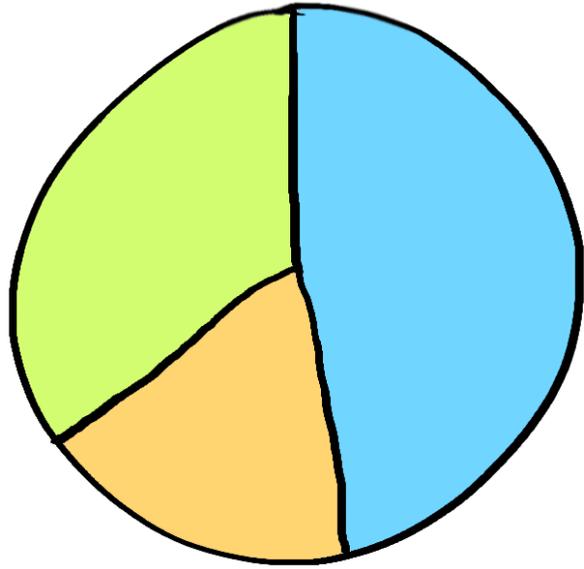
Understanding and fighting imposter syndrome

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Education can be **transformative!**

This class is **your** learning community. You have as much right to be here as anyone else.



- PEOPLE WHO GET IMPOSTER SYNDROME
- OTHER PEOPLE WHO GET IMPOSTER SYNDROME
- LITERALLY EVERYONE ELSE (THEY ALSO GET IMPOSTER SYNDROME)

EVERYONE FEELS LIKE AN IMPOSTER
SOMETIMES, AND THAT'S OKAY

ERRANTSCIENCE.COM

Kicking
imposter
syndrome's
butt

In these slides

What is impostor syndrome?

Things you can do to combat it...

- In the classroom.
- In how you treat yourself, understand success, set and accept expectations.
- In your professional interactions.

Ways to seek support, mentorship, community

What is impostor syndrome?

Persistent pattern of thoughts and feelings about one's inadequacy in a setting like your job, in academia, etc.

“I’m not good enough.” “I’m not smart enough.” “I don’t belong here.”

- Can be very sophisticated. “I did well on this one thing for x reason, but really I’m not good enough in general because I lack y.”

Feeling like one has “duped” or “tricked” others to get to the position they are in.

What is impostor syndrome?

Often contradictory evidence does little to stop those feelings or thoughts.

- Fighting it is not a one-time event. It's a long, hard slog.
- You have to constantly talk back to your inner bully.

Various kinds of social marginalization can compound and intensify this feeling.

What can I do to help myself and others?
Add clarity. Avoid pretentious jargon.

Use language to communicate. Not to impress or belittle.

When the teacher or someone else uses jargon you don't understand, ask them to explain. You are probably not the only one who's having trouble.

- People won't think you're dumb. They'll think you're brave.

What can I do to help myself and others?

Focus on building up ideas

When responding to others' ideas in class, try rephrasing their ideas in your own words. This often will help...

- Validate the speaker. Make them feel heard.
- Open up conversations about where people's takes differ.
- Add clarity for folks still working through a concept.
- Reinforces that learning is both an individual and community process. We're in this together!

What can I do to help myself and others?

Build up rather than tear down

People often mistake “critical thinking and reading” with being mean.

- This can lead to a classroom environment of taking people down instead of taking interesting ideas apart.

Read generously. Noting concerns and limitations, but also looking for how the author built on others’ work and how you want to build on the author’s. How did the context limit their perspective? How can we work to be more perspicacious?

I like to think being “critical” as a compassionate act, where we study how power relations affect a phenomenon, communities, etc., where we keep our eye on the stakes of academic inquiry.

What can I do to help myself and others?

Give props

Give props when people do cool/interesting things, whether that's your peers, your teachers, the author your reading, or you.

Fairly assess yourself and your accomplishments.

- Some people will attribute any good outcomes to others, or circumstance, but attribute all bad outcomes only to their own faults.
- Appreciate that highly successful people are successful because of their hard work AND a lot of support from other people and institutions.
- Appreciate that your successes and failures are personal AND communal.
- Know that the most important evaluation is not you vs. other people. It's how far have you come from where you started.

What can I do to help myself and others?

Give props

Considering reframing your idea of academic success away from just your publications and milestones.

- These are slow wins, and they rarely feel like a win by the time they finally come around.

Since many people contributed to my success, I count it as a success when a friend's paper I gave feedback on is accepted for publication. Or when I helped a friend edit their abstract and they get into a conference.

What can I do to help myself and others?

Talk back against unhelpful thoughts

Talk back to unreasonable/cruel thoughts that you should be perfect.

- If a person had to be perfect to speak in this classroom, no one would speak in this classroom, including the teacher.

Verbalize for others when you see them holding themselves to unreasonable/impossible standards.

See notes for more on fighting cognitive distortions.

What can I do to help myself and others?

Actively check in with yourself

Decide what *your* priorities are.

Your priorities for yourself may not be the same as your advisors. That is okay.

You can't have 17 top priorities, period. And you definitely can't expect them all to come out perfect.

- Grad school, for some, is the first time they can't meet and exceed everyone's expectations

What can I do to help myself and others?

Actively check in with yourself

There is more here to do than *anyone* can do.

Try to come up with reasonable expectations for how to meet the priorities you set. Write it out if you need to. Physically cross out unreasonable ones.

Acknowledge what you've chosen *not* to prioritize and understand those items will have less solid outcomes. That is okay.

Revisit and reassess when necessary.

What can I do to help myself and others?

Seek mentorship & support

You are allowed to look beyond your advisor and/or your department for *more* mentorship and support. It's okay to go meet professors you're not studying with. Some will be awesome. Some won't be. Find what you need and leave the rest.

This is often particularly important if your advisor is great on topic/area questions, but doesn't have experience, say, being Black, or queer, or a woman, which is part of your academic experience.

What can I do to help myself and others?
Seek mentorship & support - UWM

UWM has **multicultural centers** to support students from various backgrounds, and the **Inclusive Excellence Center** which focuses on the rewards and difficulties of being a first-generation student.

What can I do to help myself and others?

Seek mentorship & support – in your field

Every field has their own conferences and support networks. For example...

The Society for Cinema and Media Studies has a series of Caucuses (ex. Black Caucus, Queer Caucus) and Scholarly Interest Groups (Media Industries, Radio Studies), and a Graduate Student Organization. They're easy to join and friendly. Many have Facebook groups or email lists where you can get in the loop before ever going to a conference.

Twitter is a great place to build alternative networks of support

What can I do to help myself and others?

Outside school

Seek therapy

- CBT, mindfulness, group therapy, etc.

Seek community -- weekly potluck, volunteer, pursue a hobby, join a sports team

Physical activity – running, yoga, rock climbing, classes

Family time

What can I do to help myself and others?

Therapy

The Norris Health Center on campus can be a place to start thinking about what therapeutic interventions may help you.

- <https://uwm.edu/norris/counseling/>
- Low bar to participation – Let's Talk drop-in counseling <https://uwm.edu/norris/counseling/lets-talk/>
- It can take a while to find the style of counseling and counselor who are the best fit for you.

Know that I haven't always been good at this.

My accomplishments took a lot of:

- Time and work.
- Countless drafts and mistakes.
- Lots of support from friends, family, colleagues, & institutions.

I still sometimes feel like an imposter, too.

YOU ARE NOT
AN IMPOSTOR,
YOU ARE FOR
REAL.*

*IT'S NOT LUCK,
TIMING OR A LIE.
YOU DESERVE IT.