

Students juggle mental health, money, and politics as semester stress rises

By KIERRA MCQUEEN

When third-year psychology major Najjiyya Stewart scrolls through her phone between classes at Oakland University, she laughs at a meme about “college burnout,” but admits it hits too close to home.

“Everybody’s just trying to survive the semester,” Stewart said. “Between school, work, and life, it’s hard to find balance right now.”

Across campuses in Michigan and beyond, students say this fall has brought a heavy mix of financial pressure, mental-health challenges, and growing frustration with national politics. Whether studying in person or online, many feel like they’re constantly balancing bills, classes, and uncertainty about what comes next.

Financial pressure builds

At Grand Valley State University, freshman nursing major Madison McCormick said she’s already realizing how expensive college life can be.

“Even basic stuff adds up,” she said. “Between gas, groceries, and supplies for clinicals, my paycheck disappears fast.”

A University of Michigan study on college student mental health found that financial strain remains one of the top stressors among undergraduates, with nearly 60 percent reporting anxiety tied to money.

Davenport University sophomore Cameron Artist, a business administration major and football player, said he often feels the squeeze too.

“We travel a lot for games, and it gets pricey,” Artist said. “I try to save what I can, but it feels like the cost of everything keeps climbing.”

Mental health remains a struggle

Michigan State University sophomore Nick Marsh, a business management major and wide receiver on the football team, said balancing academics and athletics pushes him to his limits.

“Some weeks I’m at practice, class, then meetings till midnight,” he said. “You wanna keep your grades up and perform on the field, but mentally it wears you out.”

National data backs him up. The American College Health Association reports that more than 70 percent of students experience moderate or serious psychological distress each year.

Stewart, the OU psych major, said she notices the pressure building across campus.

“Even when people smile, you can tell they’re tired,” she said. “We’re expected to do everything — work, study, stay positive — but no one talks about how draining it really is.”

Political tension adds new stress

For Southern New Hampshire University senior Lakiedra Broadnax, who studies public health entirely online, national politics have become just as stressful as coursework.

“Watching the government shutdown situation unfold has been frustrating,” she said. “Public-health funding and student financial aid are tied to those debates, so it’s not just politics — it affects people like us directly.”

Broadnax said the uncertainty surrounding federal programs makes students question their stability after graduation.

“We already worry about money and jobs,” she said. “Now we’re wondering if the systems we rely on will even stay running.”

Searching for balance

Despite their struggles, many students said they’re finding small ways to cope. Artist said he and his teammates lean on one another for support during tough weeks.

“We keep each other grounded,” he said. “Sometimes it’s just cracking jokes in the locker room that gets you through.”

McCormick said she’s learning that balance is more important than perfection.

“I’ve started giving myself grace,” she said. “If I need a night off from studying to rest, that’s okay.”

Experts recommend that students seek campus counseling early in the semester, before workloads peak. Oakland University’s Graham Health Center offers free short-term counseling, while other Michigan schools have expanded virtual mental-health programs since 2020.

Looking ahead

As midterms pass and winter approaches, students remain cautiously hopeful. Marsh said he’s focusing on what he can control.

“I’m just trying to handle business, on the field and in class,” he said. “If I stay consistent, everything else will fall in place.”

Broadnax said her experience balancing classes, work, and uncertainty has made her more resilient.

“If we can handle college during times like these,” she said, “we can handle whatever life throws next.”

Across Michigan campuses and virtual classrooms, students are feeling the pressure — but also proving their persistence. From late-night study sessions to early-morning shifts, they

say the grind may be harder than ever, yet the goal remains the same: keep pushing forward.