

How is burnout impacting students and teaching assistants as the academic year ends?

By Addison Fallis

March 17, 2025



Jorja Koncovy, a Carleton University student, at Starbucks in MacOdrum Library on March 17. [Photo by Addison Fallis]

Both students and teaching assistants (TAs) are suffering as the school year comes to an end due to the stress of final assignments, tests, and deadlines. Burnout affects not only students but also those who are supporting them.

While universities offer resources, the question remains: are they enough?

The dual struggle

"A lot of your TAs are students too," said Jaime Snow, a TA at Carleton University. "We're also, at the end of the semester, writing our own finals and finishing up our own classes."

Snow notes that while students approach TAs with concerns, they are often unaware that TAs are managing their own stress. "I think the signs [of burnout] are just a lot of stress with deadlines, expectations, and heavy course loads," she said. "I think it's also a lack of support or knowledge of support that is available."

Burnout among TAs peaks during reading week, as they are still grading assignments and answering questions from students while also balancing their own course load. "The most important part about TA burnout is making sure it doesn't impact the students we're helping; if we're feeling burnt out, we don't have the best in us to give to our students," Snow said.

Students feeling the strain

Students are facing their own battles. Jorja Koncovy is a Carleton University student majoring in developmental psychology with a minor in linguistics, she juggles full-time work and school while trying to maintain a social life. "It can become really exhausting," Koncovy said. "When I am exhausted, I have no motivation to do schoolwork, and sometimes that can reflect poorly on my grades."

Koncovy relies on self-care routines, like doing her nails or taking time to relax, but has not accessed university resources. "Personally, I have never reached out to the school or participated in any activities they may have available to help with burnout," Koncovy said. "I always just figure it out myself."

Kate Hamilton, another Carleton student studying criminology, tries to manage her time carefully to avoid burnout.

"Sometimes, organizing my days to dedicate them to certain subjects helps, so I know exactly what I need to start working on that day," Hamilton said.

While she acknowledges the existence of support resources, she believes professors play a key role. "It is more up to the professors themselves to help students complete assignments and give them enough time to complete them."

Are resources enough?

Carleton University offers various mental health supports, including therapy services and wellness programs. Jessie Hargreaves, a departmental administrator who helps run a therapy dog program, sees the benefit of these initiatives. "I wouldn't say I see more students near the end of the year, but I can tell that the people that do come, need it more near the end," Hargreaves said. "It's quality over quantity."



Porter, a therapy dog, at the Carleton University Wellness Centre on March 17. [Photo by Addison Fallis]

However, the effectiveness of these programs seems mixed. While resources exist, students like Koncovy are not utilizing them, whether due to time constraints or feeling they need to manage burnout alone.

Snow echoed this sentiment regarding TAs, noting the value of TA mentors but acknowledging the stress that remains. "When you have a really good professor that you're working with, they're very aware that you have a lot of your own stuff going on," Snow said.

A difference is highlighted by the discrepancy between the available resources and the utilization of said sources. More involvement from instructors and promotion of these services may bridge this gap. Given their dual roles as students and educators, it is equally important to make sure that TAs receive consistent support.

The first step toward better support and understanding inside academic institutions may be seeing burnout as a shared issue between students and teaching assistants as the semester draws to a close.

