# 194 Spring Flex 2024- Chisa Burnout\_3\_12\_2024

00:00:00 **Chisa**

Have you been in these conversations? Oh my God, I'm so tired. I've been in eight hours of meetings, I've got more work to do. To which, maybe someone else says, "You think that's bad?"

00:00:11 **Chisa**

Okay, if we hear those conversations, let's put the brakes on. Let's have this be a red light. This is a sign that we have to change something. Of course, I'm not saying we should never be tired, but we should reflect on it. If you are hearing these conversations, what can we change to have better alignment?

00:00:35 **Christina**

Chisa Uyeki, collection development librarian faculty of 17 years embarked on a year-long sabbatical research project during which she studied burnout, its causes, and how to recover, and she shared her findings with us at our 2024 Spring Flex Day to contribute to building a community of care at Mt. SAC. Enjoy.

00:00:57 **Shiloh**

Thank you for joining us. For our theme this year, we chose taking care of ourselves. The Flex Day planning committee is excited to welcome our very own Chisa Uyeki, who will be speaking to us about moving from burnout to resiliency, institutional responsibility, communal care, and individual recovery.

00:01:17 **Shiloh**

Chisa is in her 17th year at Mt. SAC. She has a master's in library and information studies from UCLA, and a BA in women's studies with a focus in sociology and anthropology from a small college that no one has ever heard of. Although she's been in California longer than anywhere else, she is a New Yorker who still can't really believe she lives in Southern California.

00:01:41 **Shiloh**

Throughout her career, Chisa has had a passion for inclusivity and equity, and interest in building relationships and environments where collaboration can thrive. Working towards these interests, Chisa co-authored Mt. SAC's first campus Climate Action Plan, has served or chaired well over a dozen campus-wide committees, task forces, and work groups, as well as FA's rep council, and as a member of the Senate Executive Board and Senate Co-VP.

00:02:10 **Shiloh**

And from 2019 to 2022, Chisa was academic senate president for three and a half years. Following her term of Senate, she embarked on a yearlong sabbatical research project during which she studied burnout, its causes, and how to recover. And she's here today to share findings of her sabbatical and continue her contribution to building a community of care at Mt. SAC. Welcome, Chisa.

00:02:37 **Chisa**

Thank you so much, Shiloh. It's so nice to be with all of you here this morning, and thank you to the Flex Day Committee who put in a lot of work to make today happen, and also, as I am recording on my sabbatical, thank you to the FA and to the college for supporting sabbaticals.

00:02:54 **Chisa**

So, I spent the last year on sabbatical, working on an independent research sabbatical project on burnout, and my proposal was to study self-care. It's really important for me to tell you I'm approaching this topic as a peer and a colleague. I'm not a mental health professional.

00:03:12 **Chisa**

I am however, pretty knowledgeable about stress, burnout, and burnout recovery, both from my personal experience and from a lot of research. In developing this presentation, I had a choice between approaching the topic from a more impersonal and dispassionate perspective, but that's not who I am. It's not how I teach, and I think it's not the most effective way to share this content.

00:03:40 **Chisa**

So, I'm going to tell you a little bit about myself as well and how I came to this topic. During the presentation, I'm committing to taking care of myself, trying to contribute to communal care, speaking authentically, treating each person with respect and being present.

00:03:58 **Chisa**

I am a multitasking fool. I often think I can do multiple things at once, but we know from the research that multitasking actually creates dream. So, be as present here as you're able to be.

00:04:13 **Chisa**

I also want to ask that everyone take care of themselves. So, I know that some of us have been burned out, may be burned out, and you may listen today and figure out that you are burned out. So, I want you to take care of yourself and take care of each other.

00:04:31 **Chisa**

And then as we go forward, that's one of the things I'm asking of our community. And a final thank you to all of you for being here and having the interest to be here.

00:04:42 **Chisa**

I do want to tell you a little bit about myself as well. I am mixed race, Asian-American, cisgendered queer mother of two teenagers. Approaching this sabbatical project, and particularly, in considering the impact of racism on stress, burnout, and recovery, it's important that I acknowledge I have white skin privilege and my understanding and experience of race and racism is viewed through that lens, and through those privileges and other privileges I have, including economic and educational privilege.

00:05:19 **Chisa**

More often than not, people assume that I'm white, which means both, that I have the responsibility and the reality of this white privilege. And simultaneously, I frequently am misidentified making my own self and my actual experience somewhat invisible.

00:05:41 **Chisa**

I also have attention deficit disorder and dyslexia, and those are mostly invisible disabilities. But these are the lenss through which I take in my experiences and the standpoint from which I undertook this project.

00:05:57 **Chisa**

So, the reason that I wanted to look at burnout was I particularly wanted to look at how can we be sustainable in our leadership, especially around racial justice work. That was a focus for me during my Senate presidency, and I was very interested in looking at that, so that I could continue doing this work that I think is really important.

00:06:22 **Chisa**

As Shiloh mentioned, I've also been involved in climate action on campus, and that's another very important issue for me. As I mentioned, I'm queer, so LGBTQ+ rights is very important to me, and all of those intersect.

00:06:38 **Chisa**

As a librarian. I work in a multidisciplinary domain, and although I'm not an expert in all the other fields that this topic takes me into, I'm comfortable in the reading and analysis of scholarship from a range of fields.

00:06:53 **Chisa**

I've intentionally worked to center works by BIPOC authors in my reading and in my report. And some of those shine through here, but probably, not as many as I would like. I'm also solution-focused. If I see a problem, I want to solve it. This is true of librarians generally. We are frequently the people in the grocery store who get asked where things are or we get asked for directions a lot. We just have that here to help look on our face, I guess.

00:07:22 **Chisa**

One of my purposes and passions is to strive to be authentically engaged in making real change towards creating a more just world. And I've had incredible opportunities at Mt. SAC to be able to do this. So, now, I'm going to start telling you about burnout.

00:07:40 **Chisa**

In 2019, the World Health Organization included burnout in the international classification of diseases. When we're burned out, we may experience some combination of these three things. You don't have to experience all of them to be burned out. And a description that I thought was really good about exhaustion is feeling as tired when you wake up as you did when you went to bed.

00:08:05 **Chisa**

If you're feeling mental distance from your job, especially something that you used to be extremely passionate for, that can be a sign of burnout and not doing as well. So, reduce professional efficacy. Like many people who research and write about burnout, I was drawn to this topic because of my personal experience.

00:08:26 **Chisa**

In the nineties, I lived in San Francisco, and I worked at an HIV and AIDS service organization. This was before and during the introduction of the antiviral cocktails for people living with HIV that transformed that field. I also worked at a rape crisis center where I started as a state certified crisis counselor. So, in those fields, people talk a lot about compartmentalizing.

00:08:53 **Chisa**

I'm not a good compartmentalizer. I wasn't even 30 and I was facing burnout. So, I moved to Japan for a year to figure out what was going to be next for me. And while I was there, I figured out I was going to go to grad school to become a librarian. Wasn't sure I wanted to be a librarian, but I knew that would help me with whatever I was going to do after that.

00:09:14 **Chisa**

Fast forward 20 years and I was facing burnout again. My schedule was packed from morning to night. My work was never done. I barely had time to spend with my kids and my partner. And when I did, I was too tired to want to do anything. And naturally, this happening to me again, led me to believe that I was the problem. I knew I wasn't the whole problem. I mean COVID, right? But I did think I was most of the problem.

00:09:41 **Chisa**

I thought I just don't know how to say no. Maybe it's my ADHD, maybe I'm involved in too many things, but life just was overwhelming and nonstop. Well, what I figured out through my research is it's not my fault. So, I'm here to tell you that if you're experiencing burnout, it's not your fault. You can stop badmouthing yourself and blaming yourself.

00:10:03 **Chisa**

Burnout is the result of unmanaged stress cycles. That is a quote from a Mayo Clinic doctor, and black, indigenous and people of color, women, folks with disabilities, LGBTQ+ and other marginalized folks or targeted folks, that is they're targeted for violence, for discrimination and oppression are impacted by burnout at higher rates.

00:10:30 **Chisa**

If you're one of those people, you don't need to hear that, you know it already. Burnout is not an individual problem. It results from problematic working environments. Importantly, capitalism, white supremacy, and the patriarchy as well as other oppressive systems work against wellness.

00:10:53 **Chisa**

They do not value wellness, and they contribute to ongoing stress and burnout. How? Capitalism, including academic capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy work to keep us at an urgent pace, operating within a grind culture that never gives us a break or makes us feel like we don't deserve or aren't worthy of a break.

00:11:18 **Chisa**

These systems are built to support the primacy of folks who are not women, not BICOP, not living with disabilities, not queer, or those who have been targeted for other reasons for violence, discrimination, and oppression. These systems are not structured to support our liberation, our happiness, or our wellness. So, it's kind of a good news/bad news situation when we think about what do we do about it.

00:11:46 **Chisa**

When I proposed my sabbatical, I was focused on the individual actions that I could take, that I could share with you all that we could do to protect ourselves from burnout and to recover from burnout. I knew there was an institutional and societal component, but what I found in my work is that the self-healing and the self recovery, and the self-preservation has to be done in conjunction with broader solutions.

00:12:13 **Chisa**

And until the causes of burnout are dealt with, the prevalence of burnout won't be addressed. Systematic and cultural changes required to address burnout at the institutional level, the societal level. I want to mention, this isn't a U . S.-specific problem. This is a global problem, and the path to these solutions is through collective care and community care.

00:12:39 **Chisa**

So, the good news is that those of us experiencing burnout can work towards individual recovery. There're behaviors that are learnable and practices and strategies that can help us decrease stress and the impact of stress on our lives. But here's my caveat, there's no magic pill. Burnout happens over time, and recovery requires time and sustained effort.

00:13:07 **Chisa**

So, the bad news - the bad news is that burnout's caused by oppressive systems in our society, and therefore, in our work. And this means that unfortunately, we're not going to be able to solve the problem of the negative impacts of the system of oppression today. But what we can do today is understand what's happening, how it's happening.

00:13:30 **Chisa**

We can be more aware of each other and how we're doing. We can continue working together to address the impact of these systems on our institutions, our teaching, and our work in a more sustainable way.

00:13:43 **Chisa**

I want to add a note here that I'm particularly talking about capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy, because that's what came up in my research due to my specific question of how to sustain leadership and racial justice work. There are, of course, other oppressive systems that intersect with these and impact our society and our institution. So, to be clear, I'm not saying these and no others.

00:14:10 **Chisa**

Okay, back to the good news. So, although it does seem sometimes like these systems exist independently, that is they just are operating on their own - the good news is they're actually human-made. And why that's good news is we can dismantle them, we can reconfigure them, we can rebuild them better. We can work from where we are, and we're already on our way.

00:14:36 **Chisa**

Also, as Susan Raffo said in her book, Liberated to the Bone, we can't wait for help to arrive because we are the help. So, here's my burnout reality check, another important one if you've spaced out - not your fault, the game is rigged. Systems aren't broken, they're working the way they were built to work.

00:14:57 **Chisa**

The personal is political and self-care won't solve burnout. Commercialized self-care unfortunately, isn't going to fix burnout. We need to make fundamental systematic changes so burnout isn't a recurrence, but that takes time. So, in the meantime, we need to support each other and ourselves through communal care and recovery and resiliency. So, let's talk about healing.

00:15:25 **Chisa**

So, self-care may provide short-term relief from burnout systems, but we need bigger change to stop the prevalence of burnout. A healthy environment follows a healing environment. So, for us to have a healthy college, we've got to first be a healing college and a healed college.

00:15:47 **Chisa**

So, we have to work through how those oppressive systems have impacted the college, our students, ourselves, and one solution. One thing that may contribute to our understanding and our recovery is eudemonic wellbeing, which will support lasting recovery and resiliency. And I talk about that a little bit more. The cure for burnout is not self-care, it's all of us caring for one another. So, it's communal care. We are all under the same moon.

00:16:23 **Chisa**

"Individualism is leading us to the path of exhaustion and death. Community care will save us." That's a quote from the wonderful book, Rest Is Resistance. Individual wellbeing is not at the expense of community wellbeing. Instead, it's connected to community wellbeing and global wellbeing. It's really just the lesson of interdependence and interconnectivity.

00:16:46 **Chisa**

No person is an island, we all impact each other sometimes in small ways. Like if I'm grumpy at a faculty meeting and my grumpiness rubs off on others, and sometimes in big ways. Like if I am operating with unchecked privilege and close off my understanding of others and that could impact hiring or grading.

00:17:09 **Chisa**

Audre Lorde stated that "Without community, there's no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppressor." Similarly, without community, there's no wellbeing, and without community, there's no real self-care. An important part of communal care is shared accountability.

00:17:35 **Chisa**

So, what this means is we all have to pull our weight. Unmanageable workload is certainly a cause of burnout. Some of that is caused from uneven distribution of workload. There's some openings on committees. There are about 445 full-time faculty and a thousand maybe part-time faculty. This is not the responsibility of our adjunct faculty, but no faculty members should need to serve on more than one committee with the number of faculty members we have.

00:18:05 **Chisa**

I know we're all doing a lot of things, and you may be doing something else amazing and wonderful and supportive for the campus, or you may not have bandwidth right now. But I did want to say, oftentimes when people talk about self-care, it's couched as it's just say no, but it's also say yes.

00:18:23 **Chisa**

So, I also wanted to bring up, there is a great article that talks about self-care from an Afro-native indigenous perspective. And in it, the authors, Gamby Burns and Forristal say, "Collective and communal healing is essential for wellbeing."

00:18:41 **Chisa**

With this understanding, individual wellbeing without community wellbeing is not only not as effective, but it's not possible. Support proceeds movement. So, for a movement to grow and move forward, community has to feel safe, and there needs to be two layers of support: individual safety and community safety.

00:19:05 **Chisa**

Collective care means looking out for each other, supporting each other, taking on hard conversations, doing the work to address oppressive behaviors, and opportunities for bias. It means contributing to making changes to institutional culture towards justice, fairness, and caring.

00:19:26 **Chisa**

I think what Eldridge Cleaver said applies here, "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem." If we're not intentional about working on stopping violence, being together in the present moment, and creating conditions to allow deep healing, systems of supremacy will bring us to a place where healing is about feeling better within our isolated bubbles rather than a fiercely felt connection with light. None of this should be a task list. It's another quote from Susan Raffo, from Liberated to the Bone.

00:20:00 **Chisa**

So, these are the causes of burnout. Remember how I said it's not your fault? Maslach and Leiter who are the big burnout researchers, share that. I'm not alone in having that sense or feeling. That's actually how the systems are working to make us think that it's us. But when we approach burnout that way, the onus is on the individual.

00:20:23 **Chisa**

Their research shows that there's evidence, lots of evidence that it's not the people, but it's the social environment in which people work that causes burnout. And the workplace as a social environment is experienced within our broader societal context.

00:20:40 **Chisa**

So, we have the work-based causes of burnout. There's stressors, the stressors create chronic stress in the workplace, chronic unmitigated stress causes burnout. But all of these impact all of us. And because we work together, if anyone in our community is experiencing these, it's impacting all of us.

00:21:07 **Chisa**

So, my list of compounding factors is an incomplete list, but it's important to note facing microaggressions, navigating systems that were not built for BIPOC or LGBTQ, or other folks who are targeted for oppression, is work. It's energy-zapping and can be exhausting. So, these compound the experiences of burnout.

00:21:34 **Chisa**

So, if you are experiencing burnout, reach out and ask for help. Don't ignore your symptoms. Another reminder that we have great resources on campus, including the employee counseling center. You also have colleagues who while they may be feeling similarly, they care, and they may be able to help you strategize. If you're okay, and you know someone who's not, reach out to them, ask them for coffee or just send them an encouraging note.

00:22:04 **Chisa**

It's also really important to address that root of your burnout, the stressors, as well as addressing the stress that it's caused for you.

00:22:17 **Chisa**

So, after reviewing a lot of studies, we're cited for my sabbatical report, it's maybe 14 pages. So, there was a lot. So, on prevalency, it's bad, it's a lot. The impact is it's bad, and it's making us ... particularly educators are impacted by burnout. There was lots of data before COVID about the strain and stress on educators. During COVID, it got worse.

00:22:48 **Chisa**

65% of faculty respondents reported fatigue at work. Helping professionals are at a higher risk for burnout. Most of the writing and research is in the medical and health professions, so we need to remember as people in helping professions, the oxygen mask analogy. So, this was shared in lots of articles about burnout and helping professions.

00:23:13 **Chisa**

So, on the airplane, everyone is told to put your mask on first and then assist those who are with you who need additional help. So , this is true for caring for yourself. You have to take care of yourself to be able to care for others, and that's that interdependency. The vast majority of literature on burnout is about medical and healthcare sector.

00:23:39 **Chisa**

So, that really comes as no surprise that doctors, nurses, therapists, other care workers experience burnout at higher rates than the general public, teaching and counseling are included in helping professions, librarians as well. So, the higher rates of burnout are true in those areas.

00:24:01 **Chisa**

I did want to take a moment and just tell our nursing and allied health CTE faculty who are both health professionals and educators, I see you. That's a lot.

00:24:13 **Chisa**

So, one of the things that happens is that we approach our work as educators, as a calling as more than a job. And oftentimes, that means we may be approaching it from the perspective and we may be feeling the pressure of being student-centered, meaning that we put ourselves last, but that's not the case.

00:24:39 **Chisa**

If the work we do is not just a job and there is support, encouragement, praise, and a need for us to go above and beyond, we're existing in a culture of overwork. Have you been in these conversations? Maybe even with me? Oh my God, I'm so tired. I've been in eight hours of meetings. I've got more work to do. To which, maybe someone else says, "You think that's bad?"

00:25:06 **Chisa**

Okay, if we hear those conversations, let's put the brakes on. Let's have this be a red light. This is a sign that we have to change something. Of course, I'm not saying we should never be tired. I think I've been tired for 18 years since my daughter was born. But we should reflect on it.

00:25:23 **Chisa**

If this is regularly occurring, if you are hearing these conversations, what can we change to have better alignment? Nagoski and Nagoski called this false belief that you have to give everything you have to support others regardless of the impact on you, the human giver syndrome, which as they say is particularly a challenge for the helping professions.

00:25:50 **Chisa**

So, what do we do? How can we help at that bigger level? Educational institutions can do all of these things to improve burnout. We know that culture drives wellbeing. So, these are things that we can do to improve wellbeing and to address burnout.

00:26:11 **Chisa**

We've got to interrogate our college culture. We need to think about who is impact and what inequities we see in who is impacted, and we need to work together to make cultural changes. Some folks have it figured out, and some of this is felt differently and handled differently in different areas of the college of course.

00:26:37 **Chisa**

We've articulated already a lot of what needs to be done through our core values. Institutional responsibility is very important, particularly for our leaders. So, I want us to think about and pay attention to the human bottom line, not be focused on profit over people, or not be focused on productivity as a measure of how we are or even thinking about excellence.

00:27:06 **Chisa**

What are we saying when we want to be champions and excellent? Does that mean we want to be well and caring? In an institution the size of Mt SAC, there's going to be a range of how the causes are experienced. Different divisions and departments will be very transparent with high trust, but overworked. Others will be maybe the opposite or different.

00:27:29 **Chisa**

The reality is we've articulated the values that should support all of this work. We just have to enact them. So, paying attention to that human bottom line means health, fulfillment, wellbeing, coping. We need to shift our perspective and question our assumptions, and we can't put it on the individuals to fix.

00:27:55 **Chisa**

It's kind of like the guided pathways making the college ready for the student. We have to make the college work for the workers, for the employees.

00:28:03 **Chisa**

So, Jennifer Moss wrote a great book on burnout , and in that, she says that as an organizational problem, burnout needs organizational fixes. So, I have a critique of self-care. Self-care that's like treat yourself is commercialized, commodified, and it's not going to help the prevalence of burnout.

00:28:27 **Chisa**

So, when it's touted as a solution to the problem of burnout, when it's marketed as offering a solution to burnout, it's inadequate. For example, some of my colleagues are in disciplines that have really big challenges hiring adjuncts.

00:28:43 **Chisa**

We cannot scented candle additional adjuncts into existence. We cannot Manny Petty higher enrollment. So, we need to not just push wellness, we need to change the environment. Also, there's inequity in commodified self-care, and they don't address the stressor.

00:29:07 **Chisa**

So, they're mood-enhancing coping strategies, that's not bad. I'm not saying they're bad, I'm saying what doesn't work well is when we think they're going to solve the bigger problem. So, the focus on much of self-care is on seeking out happiness and pleasure, which can feel good temporarily, it works as an escape. But real self-care isn't a life hack, a wellness retreat or the latest fad - that's a quote from Dr. Lakshmin's book called Real Self-Care.

00:29:40 **Chisa**

Those things aren't bad. They may offer much needed relief and they'll contribute to improvement in wellness for its individually. But it's problematic if we share these strategies as all that's needed to address self-care.

00:29:54 **Chisa**

So, the difference between hedonic wellbeing and eudaimonic wellbeing - hedonic wellbeing is reaching towards happiness, maximizing our pleasure, avoiding pain. Eudaimonic is looking at meaningfulness, self-realization, actualizing human potentials.

00:30:14 **Chisa**

So, these are not mutually exclusive. They overlap, they're both important. But there is an argument for instead of constantly searching for that happiness moment, that what we need to do is connect to our purpose. And what that is and how that works is different for all of us. So, it depends what your purpose is.

00:30:42 **Chisa**

So, I'm going to end with this: faculty wellbeing is student-centered. We don't have to put ourselves last. When we put students first without boundaries, it can lead to situations where faculty feel obligated, encouraged, and supported to continuously go above and beyond.

00:31:03 **Chisa**

I tend toward the give the extra effort kind of person, which does make me more susceptible to burnout. But we need to change our perspective. Embrace that ensuring faculty are cared for and supported in their wellbeing is being student-centered.

00:31:25 **Christina**

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast, and don't forget to share your favorite episodes.