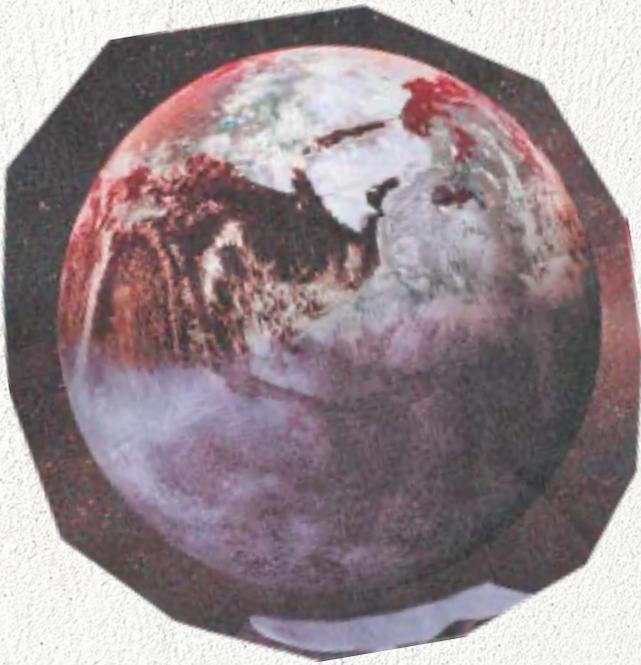




4D Experience
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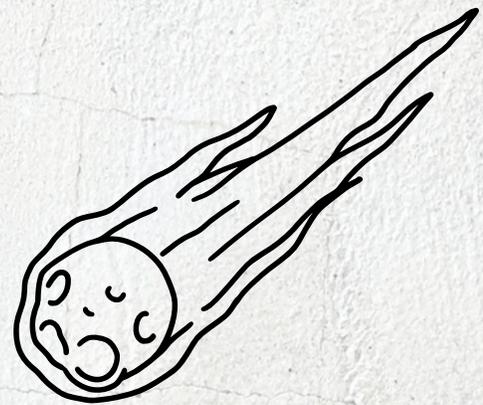
ALIGNING YOUR SPHERES



In **uncertain** political and social times, it's easy to feel anxious or *powerless* about what's happening in the world. College students today are navigating a nonstop stream of challenging news as well as *ambiguity* about the future.

This reflection helps you notice where your attention and energy go, and how to shift toward **meaningful**, sustainable action that reduces stress and builds agency.

By mapping what's in your sphere of **concern** vs. your sphere of **influence**, you can separate what you care about from what you can actually *change*, and stay engaged in the issues that matter to you while avoiding burnout.



WHY IT MATTERS

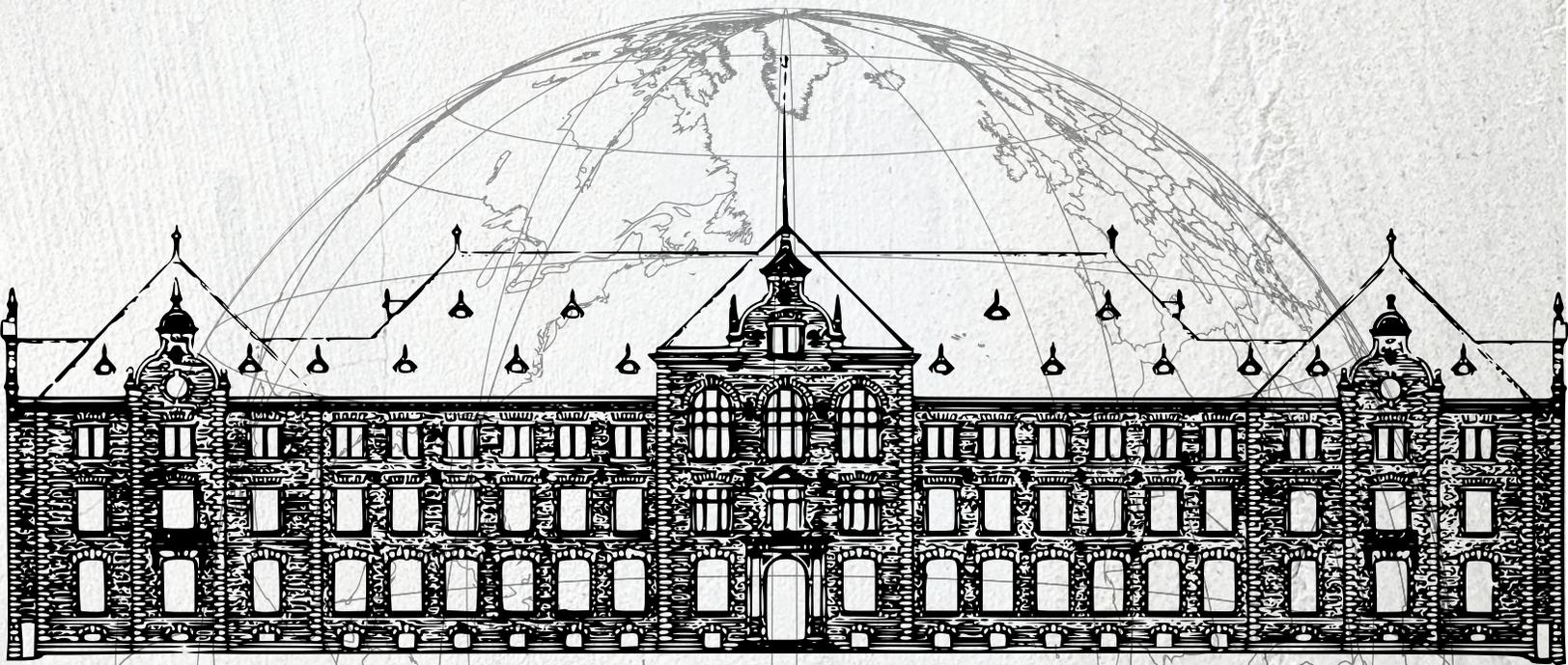
A growing body of research shows that college students are under **intense sociopolitical stress**—with real consequences for mental health.

In 2023, Gallup reported that 66% of U.S. college students said they felt stress and 51% said they felt worry. In addition, 39% said they experienced **loneliness** and 36% sadness the previous day (Gallup, 2023).

In 2024, another university study found high levels of stress among college students tied specifically to **political events** and elections. Those feeling more election-related stress also reported higher rates of depression (Ballard et al., 2024).

There is also evidence that **believing** one has little control (*external locus*) correlates with greater anxiety, depression, and stress in students. On the other hand, **internal** locus of control correlates with stronger *self-esteem* and coping skills which buffer against those risks (Kurtović et al. 2008).

Many students are not only worried but feeling overwhelmed by what seems beyond their influence. That gap between concern and perceived influence contributes significantly to distress and highlights why helping students shift toward actions they can influence is **psychologically important**.



SPHERE OF CONCERN

This includes *everything* that worries or **matters to you** e.g. climate change, elections, human rights, tuition costs, campus safety, global conflicts, etc.

You care deeply about these things—but you may **not have direct control** over them. Focusing too much here e.g. “doomscrolling” can lead to anxiety, helplessness, or *compassion fatigue*.

Examples:

- The outcome of a national election.
- The decisions made by university administration.
- Rising global tensions or economic uncertainty.
- The tone of national discourse or misinformation online.





SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

This includes the things you can **actually do** something about. When you focus here, you direct your energy toward meaningful action, and that often expands your influence over time.

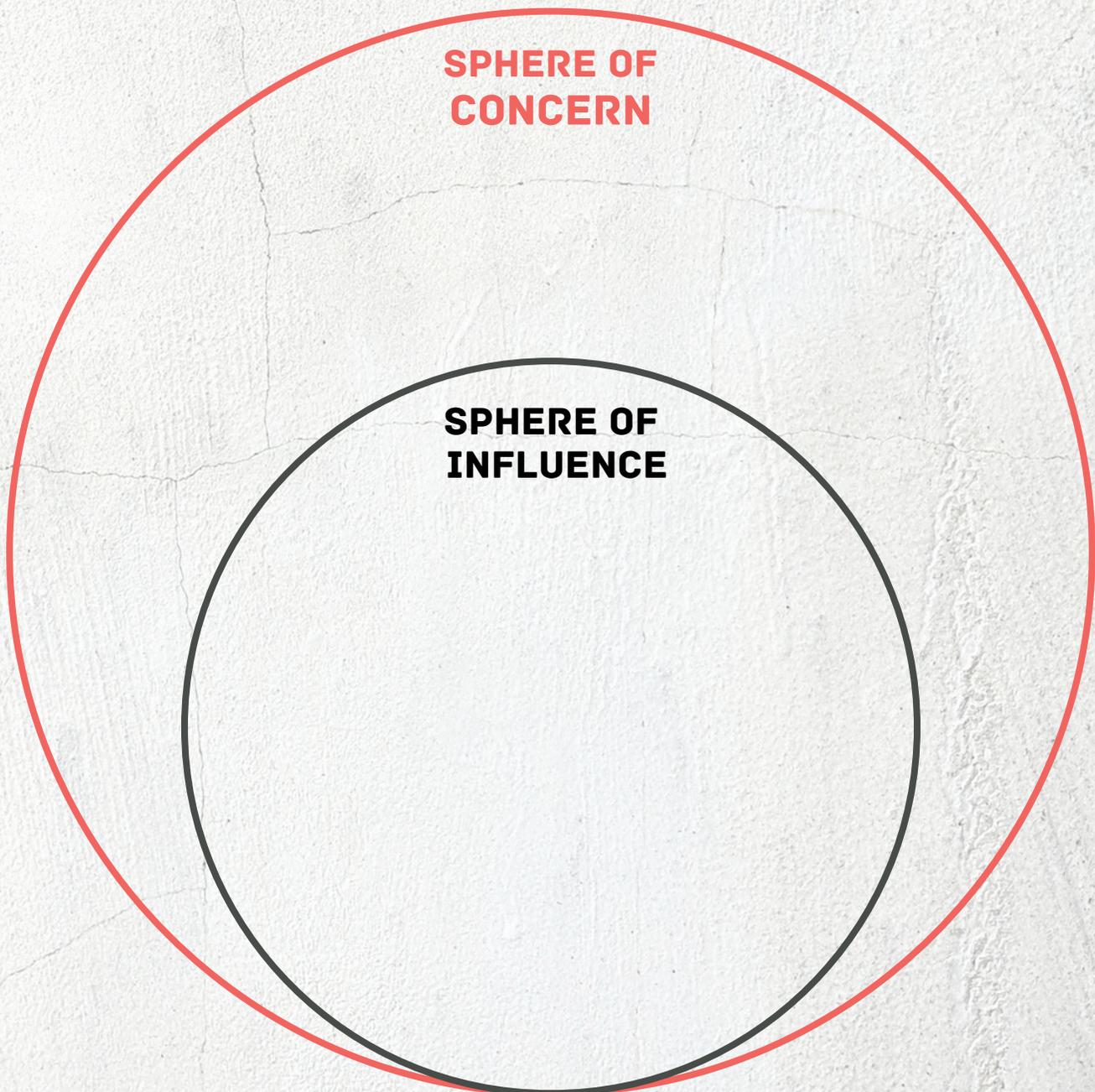
It helps you develop a sense of agency, calm, and purpose so you can stay **grounded**, resilient, and effective in times of uncertainty.

Examples:

- Having informed, respectful conversations with peers.
- Volunteering or joining a student organization working on issues you care about.
- Voting or helping others register to vote.
- Managing your media consumption and fact-checking sources.
- Taking care of your mental health to avoid burnout.

MAPPING YOUR SPHERES

- The outer circle is your **Sphere of Concern**—everything that worries, frustrates, or deeply matters to you e.g. “climate change”, “campus policy decisions”, “political division”, “social injustice”, “tuition increases”, “misinformation”.
- The inner circle is your **Sphere of Influence**—the things you can directly impact or contribute to changing. e.g. “voting”, “volunteering”, “sharing reliable information”, “self-education”, “peer conversations”, “mental health habits”.
- Take 5 minutes to **fill in both circles**.



NOTICING THE GAP

Reflect on what's in your inner and outer circles.

Which circle (concern or influence) currently **dominates** your mental space, and why?

How does it feel to focus on things you can't control? What **emotions** come up (e.g. stress, anger, hopelessness, motivation)?

How might your **well-being** change if your influence circle became more active and your concern circle more *manageable*?



BRIDGING YOUR SPHERES

Find ways to move items from the outer circle to the inner one.

- E.g. “I can’t fix climate change, but I can reduce waste in my residence hall and educate my peers.”
- “I can’t change national politics overnight, but I can volunteer for local initiatives or facilitate respectful campus discussions.”

Are there **small, realistic** actions you can take that influence these issues?

Who or what **resources** could help you amplify your influence?

How can you turn your concerns into a project, dialogue, or **act of service**?

Write **2–3 bridge** actions that connect your concerns to your influence.



RECENTER & REBALANCE



Take a breath, and reflect on these questions.

Which actions will help you feel **grounded** instead of drained?

What **boundaries** can you set around news or social media to protect your mental health?

What **support systems** do you need (physical, mental, social, emotional, spiritual) to stay engaged without burning out?

Set one **weekly intention** to act within your sphere of influence.



REVISIT OVER TIME

Your spheres aren't fixed—they evolve. As you gain experience, knowledge, and confidence, your sphere of influence often expands.

Set reminders to check in each quarter.

- **What shifted from concern to influence?**
- **What new skills or communities helped that happen?**

Quarter 1

Quarter 2

Quarter 3

Quarter 4

THANK YOU!



Please take a few minutes to give us some **feedback on your experience** using this zine workbook.

& Visit **4D Education With An Edge** for more workbooks and resources!



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