

Challenge Teams: Burnout in Academia

Case Study

Success Story: YUFE Challenge Team Tackles Academic Burnout with "Don't Burn Out!"

The YUFE (Young Universities for the Future of Europe) alliance, through Work Package Entrepreneurship & Innovation, has achieved a new milestone in co-creation. In March 2026, a multicultural student team took on a top-down mentored challenge and developed "Don't Burn Out!", an innovative tabletop roleplaying game designed to rethink wellbeing on campus.

Evaluated by a specialized committee, this project is a shining example of how international student talent can solve real-world problems through intense, one-month ideation.

The Game: A Mirror to Student Life

Designed for 2–6 players and a 90-minute session, "Don't Burn Out!" drops the traditional "Game Master" role for a shared, facilitator-led narrative. Players step into archetypes like The Juggler (balancing jobs and studies) or The Overachiever (driven by perfectionism).

To simulate academic pressure, players track three competing resources that directly mirror the real dimensions of burnout:

- Energy (combating exhaustion).
- Motivation (combating cynicism and detachment).
- Progress (combating academic inefficiency).

Safety First: The game uniquely incorporates professional safety mechanics, like the X-Card and an Open Door Policy, ensuring emotional well-being is always prioritized over gameplay.

Tested in Action: Feedback from YUFE Ideas Lab 2025-26

The Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) is one of the dynamic European University Alliances, selected by the European Commission. YUFE aims to shape a holistic and inclusive future for students and learners, and their society in Europe. The YUFE Alliance strives to be the front-running Alliance of European Higher Education in which students, learners, and staff are co-leaders, co-dreamers, and co-creators. YUFE's mission is to become a successful model of a socially responsible European University.

To validate its impact and gameplay, Work Package 7 successfully tested the game at the YUFE Ideas Lab 2025-26. International participants who were completely new to the project had the chance to experience it firsthand and share their open reviews.

The real feedback from players highlights the immense educational and interactive value of the game. Participants called it a "nice game for brain storming" and praised the character design, noting that "they covered really good characters", all supported by a "good presentation".

A Win-Win for Students and Mentors

This challenge framework creates an invaluable double-edged benefit:

- For Students: It provides hands-on experience with cutting-edge, interdisciplinary, and international ideation methodologies.
- For Mentors: Working closely with eager minds allows challenge proponents—like Associate Professor Sanja Bojanić, PhD—to tap directly into emerging talent, absorbing their fresh energy and perspectives.

Project Credits

- Game & Visual Design, Lead Writer: Miroslava Mrkalj
- Writing & Research Support: Ella Maijala, Lea Žarković, Eleni Eleftheria Kortara, Sára Pospisková, Ena Mađarević, Pranav Narkhede
- Character Art: Laura Mikulić
- Mentor: Associate Professor Sanja Bojanić, PhD
- Administrator: Martina Vižintin
- Funding: Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Possibility of having it showcased as a YUFE Product:

Don't Burn Out! The Academic Burnout Roleplaying Game

Can you survive the semester without burning out? "Don't Burn Out!" is a collaborative tabletop roleplaying game (TTRPG) about navigating academic pressure, stress, and wellbeing over the course of a demanding university semester. Created by an international team of students within the YUFE Alliance (WP7 Challenge Teams) and mentored by Associate Professor Sanja Bojanić, PhD, this game is completely free to download and play.

 [DOWNLOAD THE FREE GAME PDF](#)

Watch How to Play

Are you in a rush? Watch this quick gameplay example on YouTube before diving into your session:  [Watch the Video Tutorial](#)

Game Overview

- Players: 2–6 players.
- Duration: ~90 minutes (Single session).
- No Game Master Needed: The story unfolds through event cards and shared choices. One player simply acts as a facilitator.
- How it works: You will step into the shoes of a student archetype—like The Juggler (balancing work and college) or The Overachiever (driven by perfectionism). Together, you will face deadlines, group work, and social obligations.

Your goal? Manage your three core resources: Energy, Motivation, and Progress. Every decision involves trade-offs. If one drops too low, burnout wins.

Safe & Supportive Play

Because academic stress can hit close to home, the game features built-in safety tools like the X-Card and an Open Door Policy. This ensures that your group can explore these themes in a safe, comfortable, and supportive environment. People always come before the game!

What do you need to play?

1. Download the print-and-play PDF.
2. Grab some pens and 2–6 players.
3. Print out the Character Sheets, Event Cards, and Rules Reference included in the file.

Meet the Creators

This open-source game is a success story born from international student collaboration:

- Game & Visual Design, Lead Writer: Miroslava Mrkalj
- Writing & Research: Ella Maijala, Lea Žarković, Eleni Eleftheria Kortara, Sára Pospisková, Ena Mađarević, Pranav Narkhede
- Character Art: Laura Mikulić
- Mentor & Administration: Associate Professor Sanja Bojanić, PhD & Martina Vižintin

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