

The Mental Health Crisis on College Campuses: Classroom Strategies to Support Student Academic Wellbeing

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Abstract

Mental health issues for college students are on the rise. How can faculty help students experiencing mental health challenges perform to the best of their ability? This session will examine the mental health epidemic among college students and strategies that campuses are enlisting to address this pervasive trend. Participants will brainstorm methods that faculty can use to support students with mental illness.

Anxiety, Stress, Course Design

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Introduction

The first part of this round table will discuss the increased mental health concerns that are prevalent on our college campuses. Even while mental health concerns are on the rise on college campuses, it does not mean that each student has the needed supports in place. In a best-case scenario, students are aware of their own mental health status, seek support, and, when required, register for appropriate accommodations. Unfortunately, students often fail to secure the academic support and assistance and medical care that they need. These students come into our classrooms where we are expecting them learn complex material and produce quality work. This pressure can aggravate the underlying mental health of students. These mental health issues may not be visible or known thus it is important that faculty are aware of the trends in mental health of students.

Outcomes of the roundtable session include: 1) discuss the impact in the classroom of the increasing number of students with mental health concerns, 2) identify how campus are currently addressing the increase need for mental health services, and 3) brainstorm solutions/support mechanism that can be used in the classroom. First time, seasoned instructors, and everyone in between will contribute and benefit from this discussion. Participants will increase their awareness of mental health trends on college campuses and identify methods to support students who are experiencing mental health concerns.

Theoretical Foundations

Twenty years ago, one out of every 10 students self-reported as in need of mental health services. Today, one in three students could use support. In 2016, 65% of college students reported overwhelming anxiety in the last year (American College Health Association,

2016). The 2017 American College Health Association survey of 63,000 college students determined that 60% reported intense concern and unease and 40% reported symptoms of depression severe enough to impede regular function. In addition, 50% of college students rate their mental health as poor. Approximately 39% of college students will experience a mental health issue and 1 in 5 students reported thoughts of suicide last year.

The Center for Collegiate Mental Health 2018 Annual Report (*Center for Collegiate Mental Health 2018 Annual Report*, January 2019), reports that of anxiety and depression are the most common concerns of students seeking counseling services. Student self-reports of anxiety and depression continued to increase compared to previous annual reports. Particularly concerning is the fact that the rate of threat-to-self characteristics for students seeking counseling services increased for the eighth year in a row.

Faculty need to be aware of these trends and what is happening because it impacts student performance. Test anxiety has been linked to lower GPA in graduate and undergraduate students (Chapell, Blanding, Silverstein, Takahashi, Newman, Gubi & McCann, 2005). Depression has been found to negatively impact exam performance and overall academic performance (Andrews & Wilding, 2004). As instructors, we believe that we should work to create an environment supportive of all students including those with mental health challenges.

Campuses are working to respond to the increase in mental health needs. Time Magazine published a recent article address the challenges faced by campus to keep up with the demand (Reilly, 2018). Campus have looked at increasing outreach to students (Delucia-Waack, Athalye, Floyd, Howard, & Kuszczak, 2011), increase counseling services, and other support services (Beiter, Nash, McCrady, Rhoades, Linscom, Clarahan, & Sammut, 2015; Kumaraswamy, 2013; Mahmoud, Staten, Hall, & Lennie, 2012). These responses primarily focus on opportunities

outside the classroom. As faculty we have the capacity to influence the learning environment directly.

While some students may have an existing mental health concerns, some students may experience a traumatic event leading to distress (Bohannon, Clapsaddle, & McCollum, 2019; Lambert, Lambert and Lambert, 2014). Whether preexisting or a response, students bring the effects of their mental health state into the classroom. So what role do faculty play? Lambert, Lambert and Lambert (2014) provide guidance to faculty so they can be alert to identifying students in distress and respond in a supportive way. That response may range from direct intervention, aligned with the campus policy, or less direct methods of monitoring academic progress (Bohannon, et. al., 2019; Lambert, et. al., 2014). Bohanon, et al. (2019) also suggests that faculty should consider modifications to content, process, and product to help students who are experiencing the negative effects of a trauma. They further suggest that colleges should consider trauma-informed initiatives. For example, a recent study demonstrates the impact of including emotional learning in the college classroom (Stocker & Gallagher, 2019).

Conclusion

College campus have become increasingly aware of the challenging that students are facing. Most of the response has been outside the classroom. Using the collective wisdom of the participants, we will work to identify how we, as faculty, are able to provide a supportive environment for students who are experiencing mental health issues. We want our students to perform at their best and be able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. By creating a classroom environment that is supportive for those experiencing mental health issues, we can ensure that all students have an opportunity to succeed.

Session Description

The session is designed to ensure maximum participant involvement.

5 minutes – Session Introduction

Introduce the topic and presenters and plan for the session

10 minutes – Participant Introductions

Each participant will be asked to briefly introduce themselves

15 minutes – Discuss the trends in mental health

15 minutes – Discuss what are campuses are doing to address mental health

15 minutes – Brainstorm what we can do in the classroom

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