

The Student Voice

Subject: Mental Health

Data Collected via Qualtrics March, 2022

Prompt 1: *What has most impacted your mental health in the last 6-12 months?*

The most common answers were often intertwined. They centered on financial challenges, school, COVID, and relationships. The distance from family or the loss of family members was a prevalent theme along with generally heightened relationship stress. The stress of balancing work and school life was evident, with comments about the amount of coursework being completed, instructor empathy, and post-graduation uncertainties. Identity-related stressors such as diversity, social justice, sexual orientation, ability, chronic health issues, and age influence feelings of belonging and support. Physical stressors such as a lack of transportation and the weather were also mentioned.

Prompt 2: *College and life are both hard. What are the best ways you've found to maintain your mental health while in college?*

Answers to this prompt centered primarily on connecting with people, taking care of physical health, and using specific self-care techniques. People talked about the importance of routine and organization. They set boundaries and have reduced workloads if possible. Many cited using professional services, whereas some just cope by "staying focused on the goal". While the majority of students have coping strategies in place, several students said they simply haven't yet figured out good strategies that work for them.

Prompt 3: *How comfortable are you asking for help with your mental health when you or a friend need it? (i.e. Do you know who you can ask? Are you worried about confidentiality? Are you worried about being judged?)*

This prompt generated a wide range of responses. Some students are very comfortable asking for help, while others are not. Friends and family were cited as key resources. Others were open to professional help but struggle to find it for various reasons. Several students recognized that they often wait until they've reached a breaking point and wish they would ask for help earlier. Others feel as though they are "not suffering enough" to ask for assistance. Another set of responses indicated worries about the impact on professional employment in the future in their field of study if they sought mental health support.

Prompt 4: *In your classes, what could instructors do to better support mental health?*

Students ask instructors to be supportive and more understanding of life outside the classroom. Please continue to care about students and to work towards more personal interactions. Some students reported being shamed for accommodations requested related to illness or disability. A transgender student discussed the added stress when incorrect pronouns or a deadname is used. Students would appreciate resources and mental health statements being included in the syllabus. Some students would appreciate a reduced load, and one student cited a particular professor who includes "brain breaks" (songs, short videos, etc.) as a helpful classroom strategy.

Prompt 5: *Outside of the Counseling Center services, what else could be done on campus to improve mental health for students?*

Students would like to see efforts to “normalize” mental health care and techniques on campus. They want to break any remaining stigmas on the subject. Specific ideas include quiet/reflection spaces on campus, more events and clubs related to positive mental health, and a weekly email with tips, tricks, and affirmations. It is also clear that students are aware of the therapy dogs that sometimes visit campus, and would like much more of that type of interaction.

Demographic Notes:

59 students responded to open-ended questions through an anonymous Qualtrics survey. Students were asked to simply list identities important to their sense of self. Respondents included 10 races/ethnicities, and represented ages 19-64. Marital status was reported as married, single, and single parent. Sex was listed as both male and female, with gender identities listed as cisgender, transgender, non-binary, and genderfluid. Sexual orientation included bisexual, lesbian, questioning, asexual, heterosexual, demisexual, and aegosexual. Respondents reported coming from low-income, working-class, and middle-class backgrounds. Military service was noted by a number of respondents. Ability was reported as disabled, able-bodied, and mentally challenged. Spirituality/religion responses included spiritual, Christian, atheist, agnostic, pagan, and not religious.