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Targeting The Gap in Mental Health Advocacy for First-Year College Students

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TARGETING THE GAP IN MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY FOR FIRST-YEAR
COLLEGE STUDENTS

Hailey Kurtz

Honors Project

Submitted to the Honors College at Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for graduation with University Honors

Dr. Meagan Docherty & Dr. Marlise Lonn

April 24, 2023

INTRODUCTION

The visibility of mental health and the challenges that individuals face, some on a daily basis, to their mental health have become more prevalent in recent years. Mental health and those suffering from mental illness still carry a large stigma against them but the more that mental health and wellness is talked about, the better we as a society can accept and care for those struggling. Creating a safe environment for open dialogue surrounding mental health and mental illness is crucial in ensuring that those who need help are able to receive it. Drastic changes in one's life, such as moving or a shift in one's support system, can have a significant impact on the individual's mental health and overall well-being. These effects are exaggerated if the individual does not have the support of others, proper coping skills, or advocacy resources readily available to them. The ability to recognize when you are facing challenges to your mental health as well as when others around you may be struggling, having knowledge of available resources, and how you can support yourself and others has the potential to change, and even save, someone's life.

When discussing drastic changes to an individual's life, a common change that many young adults face is the transition from high school to attending a university. Making this transition often entails that an individual leaves their hometown, thus leaving their family and support systems behind, to live in what is often an unfamiliar place with unfamiliar people. These individuals, for approximately 18 years, have had parents, siblings, friends, and family alongside them to talk to, to help them make decisions, and to help them take care of themselves. Moving to a university requires the student to leave all of this behind and, suddenly, they are completely responsible for taking on many of the tasks that their family and guardians had previously helped them with. The student is expected to live within a residence hall, often sharing a room with one or multiple students that they have never met before, while balancing

the challenges that come with adjusting to a new environment and more academically rigorous coursework. To make matters more challenging, the timing of this transition to university coincides with the developmental transition from adolescence to early adulthood. As discussed earlier, these drastic changes in the student's life can have a dramatic impact on the student's mental health and well-being, often causing it to suffer, if they are not able to identify an appropriate support system or resources to help them.

This topic is of importance to me as I have personally experienced challenges to my mental health and well-being throughout my undergraduate career, most notably during my first year on campus. Not only have I experienced such challenges, but I have also witnessed others struggle as well. The inspiration for this project comes from a moment during my first year at Bowling Green State University when I found myself overwhelmed, uncertain about my future, and without anyone to confide in. At this same time, my roommate was struggling with anxiety and depression. Neither of us could identify an appropriate support system to receive help from so we turned to each other. The problem with this, however, was that we were not sure how to help one another and often made the situation worse. At that time, I decided that additional research and information was needed to help create and provide resources to students to protect and support them through one of the more challenging transitions they will face in their lifetime.

The purpose of this project and guiding research question is how do current students at Bowling Green State University feel that their transition from high school to university impacted their mental health, what challenges to their mental health do they face as a university student, and what gaps in mental health and well-being support are prevalent?

LITERATURE REVIEW

When reviewing past literature related to mental health and well-being challenges faced by first-year students and ways that have been shown to help students alleviate such challenges, it became clear that there are still gaps in knowledge surrounding why students struggle and how to best help them adapt to life as a university student. One point, however, that was clear throughout the literature is that students do suffer from increased anxiety and depression during their first year at a university. For example, one study found that from the start of their first year to the conclusion of that academic year, students displaying symptoms of anxiety increased from 33% of students to 39% and students showing symptoms of depression increased from 28% to 36% (Duffy et al., 2020). These increases were then shown to be a predictor of lower cumulative grades. Another study found that there is a positive relationship between study load and depression and that GPA and study load are negatively related (Cheung et al., 2020). This finding was supported by another piece of literature which found that the increase in depression and anxiety that university students are facing coincides with lower thriving, lower GPA, less connection to their school, and lower self-compassion (Kroshus et al., 2021). A concern of burnout is also an important finding from literature to note. A study found that while first-year students do not report higher levels of burnout than other years, they report a higher level of psychological distress which has been linked to an increase in burnout rates in future years at university (March-Amengual et al., 2022). A call for a more comprehensive approach was made, citing the need for a combination of literacy, prevention, and treatment. Such approaches have found success in an online format. A final study that examined what mental health challenges students faced during university should be noted as it studied how mental health diagnoses were related to a student's classification of year in college. This study found that first-year students

have higher rates of self-injury and suicidal ideations. It also notes that upperclassman report higher rates of their academic performance being impacted by their mental health. Without receiving proper help during their first year, the challenges that these students face are likely to be related to the manifestation of mental health crises in their later years (Wyatt et al., 2017).

More specific challenges that first-year students face can be tied to their living situations. It is customary for many universities to require their students to live on-campus within residence halls their first, and sometimes second, year of college unless the student's home is within a certain mileage which qualifies them to commute. A study done specifically on the stress that comes with living arrangements in college found that on-campus students reported higher stress in relation to their living arrangements when compared to those who live off-campus. While off-campus students are not immune to mental health challenges, this study shows that living on-campus provides an additional stressor to students already facing a tough transition from high school to university (Hicks & Heastie, 2008).

The studies mentioned above help prove a link between beginning university and mental health challenges, but it is also important to discuss the studies that have examined various efforts to try to help students avoid and deal with mental health challenges that they are likely to face. A mindfulness training program was implemented in one such study to help students avoid partaking in maladaptive coping mechanisms when they find themselves under stress. The mindfulness program helped students develop an interpersonal and intrapersonal awareness of how to cope, leading students to feel more prepared in making healthy decisions, creating and maintaining healthy relationships, and ultimately increased their resilience. Following the implementation of this program, students reported a reduction in depression and anxiety and an increase in general life satisfaction (Dvořáková et al., 2017). Another study that shows promise,

included an emotion regulation skills training program that was implemented in a first-year experience course. While the program showed that learning emotion regulation is complex and difficult, parts of the training laid important groundwork in the students' ability to develop and regulate their socioemotional skills (Van Doren et al., 2021). A final study that implemented a program designed to help first-year students was the implementation of a mental health literacy intervention known as *Transitions* which was coupled with education on life skills needed for first-year students. Those who completed the program, in comparison to those in the control group, reported a better understanding of mental health, a decreased stigma towards mental illness, were more likely to seek help for their mental health, and overall had less stress (Wei et al., 2021).

Another important study noted that students who report higher levels of self-compassion are at a higher likelihood of having a successful transition to university. Programs that help students build and maintain self-compassion have had success, but self-compassion falls short if the student is also facing chronic stressors (Kroshus et al., 2021). Along with self-compassion, other personal characteristics of students have been studied to examine if there is a link between personal characteristics and a student's ability to cope with mental health challenges while attending university. Such characteristics studied include optimism and self-efficacy. It was found that optimism moderately contributes to a student's successful transition but reported self-efficacy was the largest measured predictor of a successful transition to university (Morton et al., 2014).

Following extensive literature review, as detailed above, it is evident that there is still a gap in knowledge on what precisely causes students to struggle with mental health during their first year at university in particular. With the understanding of the current knowledge of mental health

challenges faced by first year university students, as well as what measures have been shown to be effective in helping students combat such challenges, the guiding research question and methodology of this project was developed. Though this project and research is limited to survey respondents and does not actively implement new programs for first-year students, it seeks to provide further information on this important topic that can aid, potentially, in the creation of new and improved programs in the future.

METHODS

The research needed to answer the guiding question of this project was conducted using the online survey platform, Qualtrics. Participants were recruited to participate in the study through Campus Updates, an announcement platform that sends a daily mass email to all individuals associated with Bowling Green State University, the Scroll, an announcement platform that sends a weekly mass email to all individuals associated with the Honors College at Bowling Green State University, the Bowling Green State University Office of Pre-Professional Programs, as well as several student organizations. Once informed consent was obtained, the participants were taken to the survey where they were asked a series of questions related to their mental health and well-being, challenges they faced during their time as a university student, and the resources available to them (see Appendix A). Once each participant completed the survey questions they chose to answer, they exited the survey, and the results were saved for analysis.

RESULTS

A total of 70 participants responded to the survey. The survey was available for students to take for a two-week period. The format of the questions included multiple choice, select all that apply, and written responses. The online survey platform, Qualtrics, provided an analysis of the responses to each of the questions. For written responses, I identified the common themes presented in the responses and sorted the responses accordingly. These themes varied for each question that required a written response. Each question was analyzed individually. No question was required for participants to respond to, so the response percentages varied per question which is noted in the analysis of each question.

The first question that participants were asked to respond to was to identify their current year in their undergraduate education. A total of 63 survey participants answered question one. There was a relatively even distribution of responses from first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year survey participants. There were more survey participants that indicated that they were a first-year student, with 22 of the 63 participants (35%) indicating that they are in their first year of their undergraduate education at Bowling Green State University. 15 of the 63 participants were second-year students (24%), 12 were third-year students (19%), 13 were fourth-year students (21%), and one student was a fifth-year or beyond (1.6%).

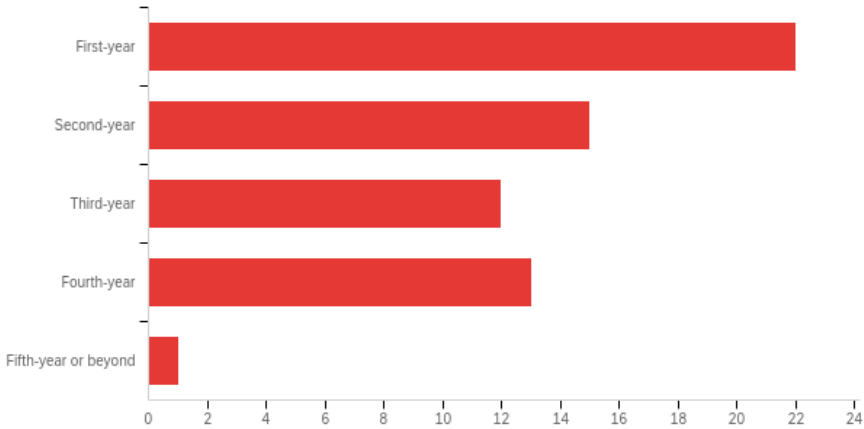


Figure 1: Results of question one of the Qualtrics survey.

The second survey question that was asked to participants asked them to indicate if they have suffered from challenges to their mental health since attending university. A total of 63 participants responded to this survey question. 30 of the 63 participants (48%) indicated that they are currently struggling with their mental health. 23 of the 63 participants (37%) indicated that they have, at one point, struggled. Nine of the 63 participants (14%) indicated that they have never struggled, and one of the 63 participants (1.6%) indicated that they are unsure if they have struggled with their mental health. This indicates that 84% of survey participants have experienced challenges to their mental health since attending university at Bowling Green State University.

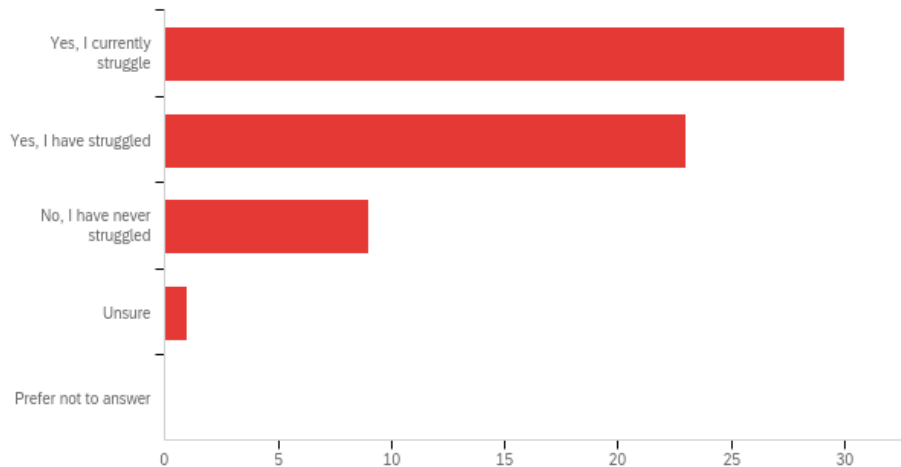


Figure 2: Results of question two of the Qualtrics survey.

The third question that was asked to participants was if they indicated yes in any manner in their response to question two, to describe what challenges they faced and what, if anything, they did to alleviate such challenges. 49 participants responded to this question of the survey. Their written results were sorted into two sections: what challenges they faced and what they did to alleviate those challenges, if anything. These sections were then assorted into individual subsections. What challenges they faced were sorted into the following subsections: depression only, anxiety only, anxiety and depression, anxiety and depression along with other challenges, moving away from home/living on campus, self-worth, loneliness, academic stress, and various unique challenges. 12 (24%) of the participants indicated that they suffer from both anxiety and depression, which was the subsection that the most participants identified with. What the participant did to alleviate challenges they faced were sorted into the following subsections: multiple ways, still struggling, professional help (therapy and/or psychiatry), support system,

hobbies, and unique methods. Using a support system and multiple ways of alleviating their mental health challenges had the highest number of participants that identified within these subsections.

Table 1: Survey participant responses to question three on identifying the challenges they faced.

Subsection	Number of Participants Identified
Depression Only	2
Anxiety Only	5
Anxiety and Depression	12
Anxiety and Depression Along with Other Challenges	4
Moving Away from Home/Living On-Campus	4
Self-Worth	3
Loneliness	6
Academic Stress	7
Various Unique Challenges	5

Table 2: Survey participant responses to question three on the methods they used to alleviate the challenges they faced.

Subsection	Number of Participants Identified
Multiple Ways	10

Still Struggling	6
Professional Help (Therapy and/or Psychiatry)	6
Support System	9
Hobbies	5
Various Unique Methods	4

Question four of the survey asked those who indicated that they have not struggled with their mental health to share what helped them avoid such challenges. Nine participants responded to this question. The responses to this question ranged from keeping a positive and optimistic mindset, surrounding themselves with a positive support system, using a planner, faith, and luck.

Question five of the survey asked participants to identify how often they face challenges to their mental health. 61 participants responded to this question of the survey. Four participants (7%) indicated that they have never struggled while 21 participants (34%) indicated that they struggle often, multiple times a week. In addition, 13 participants (21%) indicated that they struggle somewhat often, approximately once a week, while the rest of the participants indicated that they struggled rarely, somewhat rarely, or occasionally.

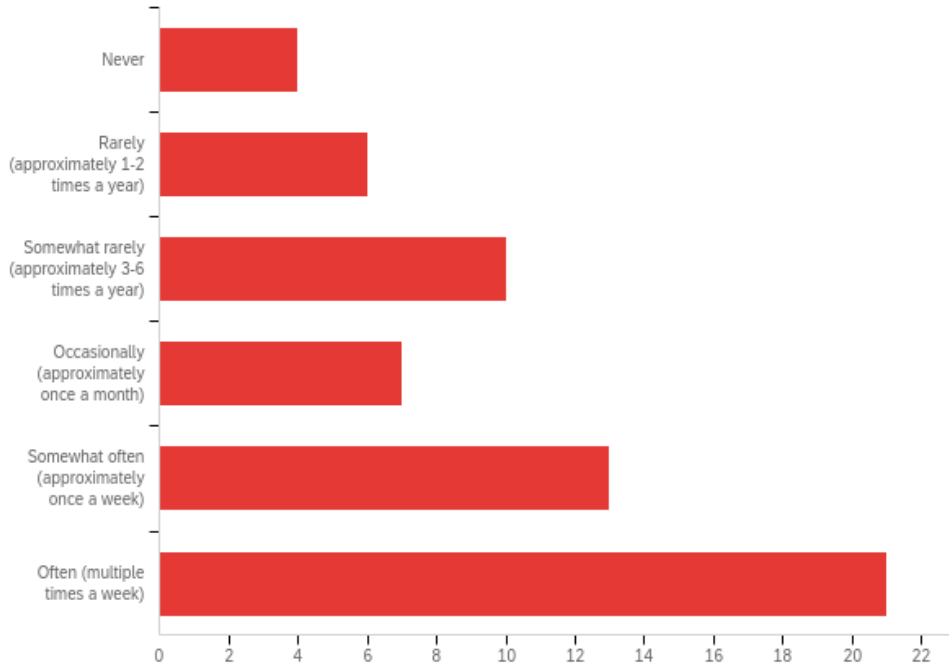


Figure 3: Results of question five of the Qualtrics survey.

61 participants responded to survey question six, indicating whether they have known or currently know of a university student struggling with their mental health. Over half of the participants (40, 66%) indicated that they know someone currently and two participants (3%) indicated that they have never known someone struggling with their mental health.

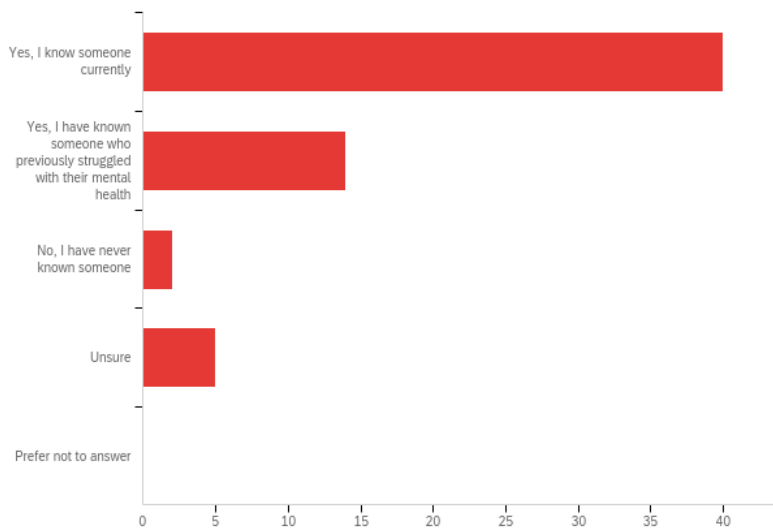


Figure 4: Results of question six of the Qualtrics survey.

Question seven asked participants to indicate if they would feel confident in their ability to help a peer if they were confided in that the peer was struggling with their mental health. 61 participants responded to this question of the survey. 24 participants (39%) indicated that yes, they would feel confident, and 32 participants (53%) indicated that they would feel confident with additional help. This indicates that the majority of survey participants would feel confident if a peer confided in them, especially if they had additional help.

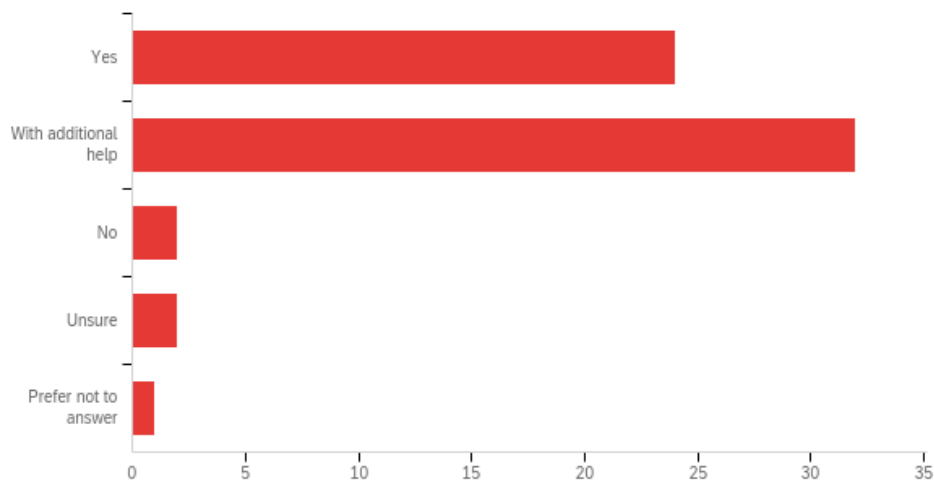


Figure 5: Results of question seven of the Qualtrics survey.

The eighth survey question asked participants how they would help a peer that confided in them about mental health challenges. 50 participants responded to this question. The written responses were able to be separated into two sections: listen and refer the peer to professional help/resources and listen and provide support/advice. 29 participants (58%) reported that they would listen and refer the peer to a professional and resources. 21 participants (42%) reported that they would listen and provide support/advice.

The ninth survey question was an attention check and asked participants to identify which of the choices was a vegetable. The correct answer was broccoli. 62 participants responded to this question and 100% of participants correctly identified broccoli to be a vegetable.

The tenth question of the survey asked participants if, as a first-year student, they felt prepared to face the potential challenges that attending university could cause. 57 participants responded to this question and just under half of the responses (25, 44%) indicated that they did feel prepared. 12 participants, 21%, indicated that they would have felt prepared with additional help. 18 participants, 32%, indicated that they did not feel prepared as a first-year student to face the potential challenges to their mental health that university may cause.

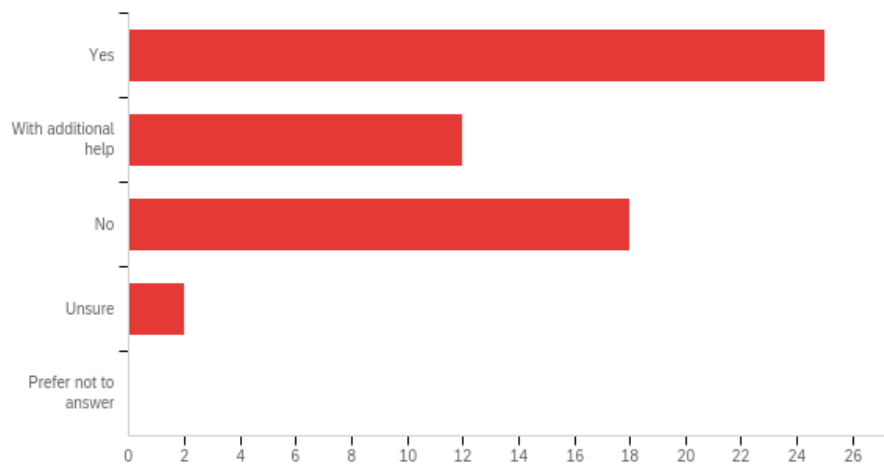


Figure 6: Results of question 10 of the Qualtrics survey.

Question 11 of the survey, which 57 participants responded to, asked participants how often, as a first-year student, did they face challenges to their mental health. 22 participants (39%) indicated that they faced challenges often, defined as multiple times a week, and 11 participants (19%) indicated that they faced challenges somewhat often, defined as approximately once a week. Three participants (5%) indicated that they never faced challenges during their first year at university.

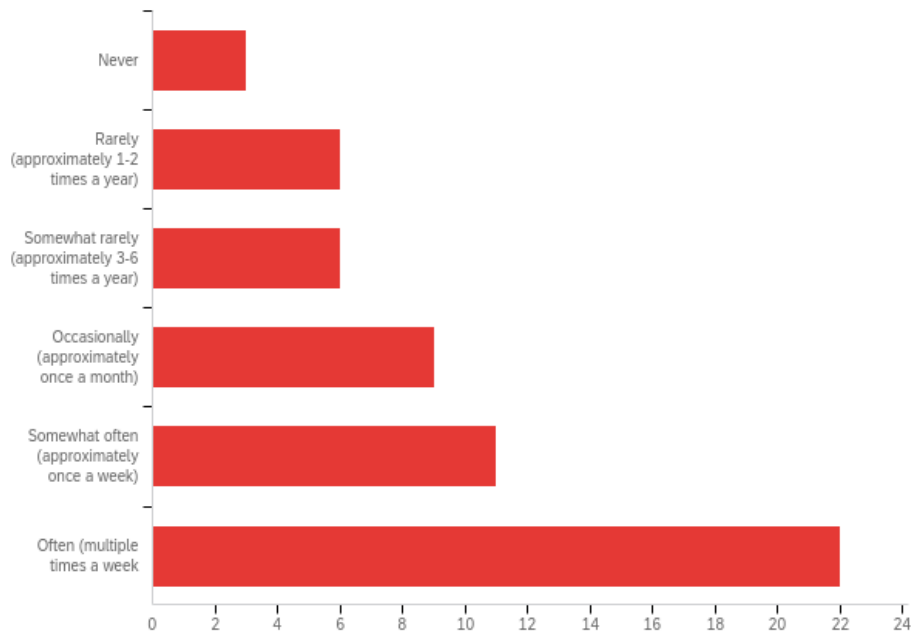


Figure 7: Results of question 11 of the Qualtrics survey.

Question 12 of the survey asked participants to identify which aspects of attending university their first year were the most challenging for them. 57 participants responded to this question of the survey. The written responses were separated into the following categories: new environment, being alone/fitting in, not feeling prepared, meeting expectations, time management/academics, the COVID-19 pandemic, and multiple reasons. 15 participants (26%) indicated that they struggled with being in a new environment and 14 participants (24%) indicated that they struggled with being alone/fitting in. Time management and the challenge of academics was also identified by 11 participants (19%) to be what they struggled most with.

Table 3: Survey participant responses to question 12 of the Qualtrics survey.

Categories	Number of Participants Identified
New Environment	15
Being Alone/Fitting In	14

Not Feeling Prepared	3
Meeting Expectations	3
Time Management/Academics	11
COVID-19 Pandemic	4
Multiple Reasons	7

Question 13 of the Qualtrics Survey asked participants to indicate what mental health and well-being resources that Bowling Green State University offers they were aware of as a first-year student. 58 survey participants responded to this question. 53 of the participants (91%) were aware of the Counseling Center and 43 (74%) were aware of Individual Counseling. The THRIVE Initiative and Relationship Counseling were the resources that participants were most unaware of, 78% and 57% respectively.

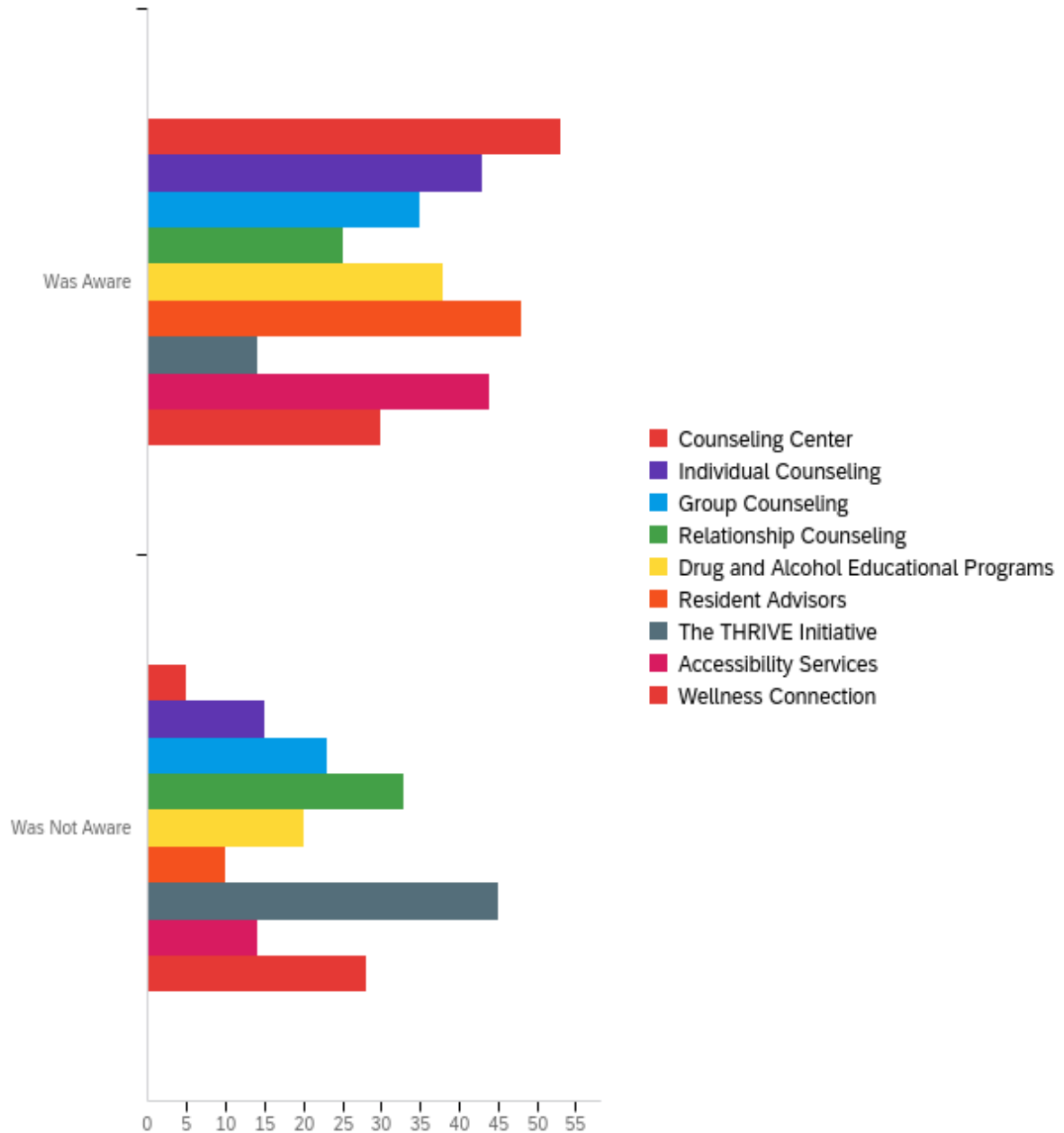


Figure 8: Results of question 13 of the Qualtrics survey.

The 14th question of the survey asked students to identify any additional on-campus mental health resources that they were aware of that were not listed in question 12. Five participants responded to this question. The responses were Her Choice, LGBTQ+ Resources,

support groups, student-athlete mental health options with Dr. Pecar, and the Behavioral Health Services at the Falcon Health Center.

Question 15 asked participants which mental health and wellbeing resources on Bowling Green State University's campus they have used. 55 participants responded to this question. Of the resources used, the Counseling Center was most used with 16 participants (29%) indicating that they used this resource. Many of the other resources were unused by participants, but the most unused resource was the THRIVE Initiative with 54 participants (98%) indicating that they did not use it. These results align with the results of question 12.

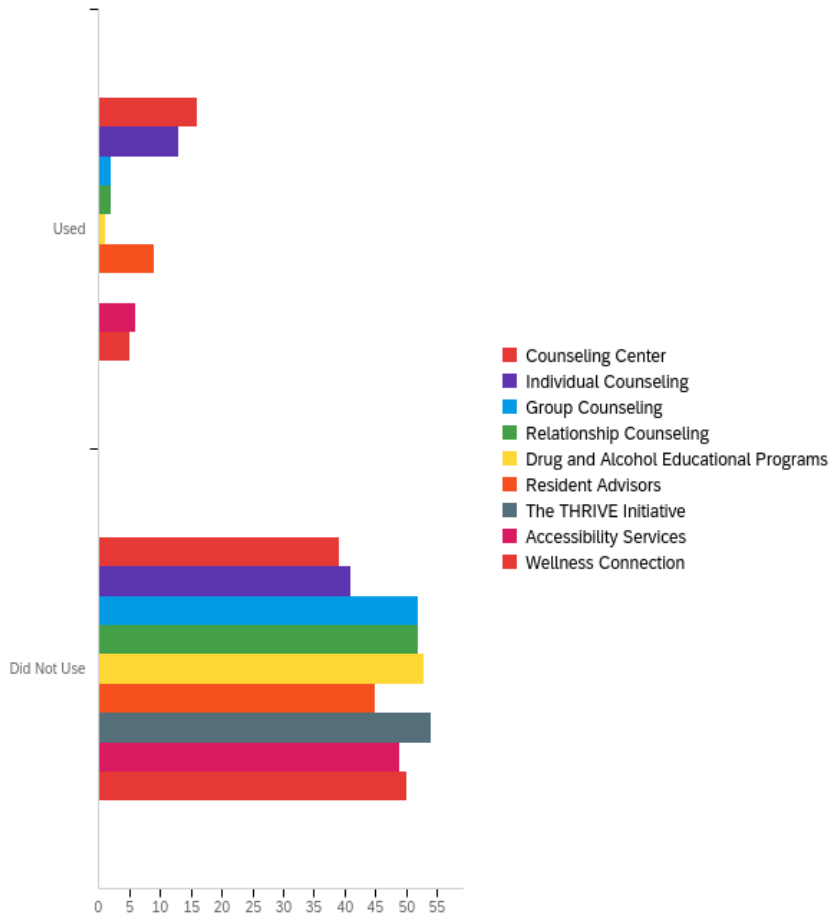


Figure 9: Results of question 15 of the Qualtrics survey.

Question 16 asked survey participants to identify any additional on-campus mental health resources that they used that were not listed as an option for question 14. Five participants responded to this question. The responses were the Fly Program, Her Choice, PAWs Program, Dr. Pecar, and a psychiatrist at the Falcon Health Center along with a personal therapist.

The seventeenth question on the survey asked how effective the participants found the mental health resources on-campus to be. 56 participants responded to this question of the survey. Exactly half of respondents (28, 50%) indicated that they did not use any mental health resources. 12 participants (21%) found the resources to be effective while six participants (11%) found them to not be effective. The rest of the participants (10, 18%) found them to be somewhat effective. No participants indicated that the resources they used were extremely effective.

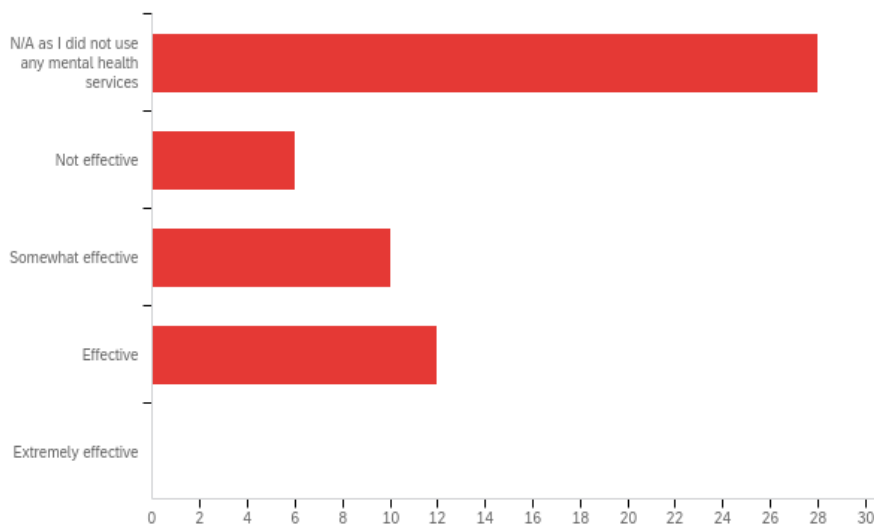


Figure 10: Results of question 17 of the Qualtrics survey.

Question 18 of the survey asked participants to indicate which of the mental health and well-being resources that they used, if they used multiple, did they find to be the most effective and why. 14 participants responded to this survey question. The responses were split into the categories listed here: Counseling Center, N/A, Wellness Connection, Group Therapy, Personal

(non-campus affiliated) therapist. Eight participants (57%) indicated the Counseling Center was most effective for them. Two participants (12%) listed N/A, not applicable. One participant (7%) listed the Wellness Connection and one participant (7%) listed Group Therapy. Two participants (14%) listed a personal, non-campus affiliated therapist to be the most beneficial.

Question 19 of the survey asked participants which of the mental health and well-being resources that they used to be the least effective. 10 participants responded to this question of the survey. Four participants (40%) identified the Counseling Center, five participants (50%) responded N/A, and one participant identified the Resident Advisors (10%).

The 20th question of the survey asked participants how often they used mental health wellness resources. 58 participants responded to this question of the survey. Over half of the participants, 55%, indicated that they have never used mental health and wellness resources. Seven participants (12%) indicated that they use these resources rarely, defined as approximately one-two times a year. Six participants (10%) indicated that they use these resources somewhat often, defined as approximately once a week. No participant indicated that they use these resources often, defined as multiple times a week.

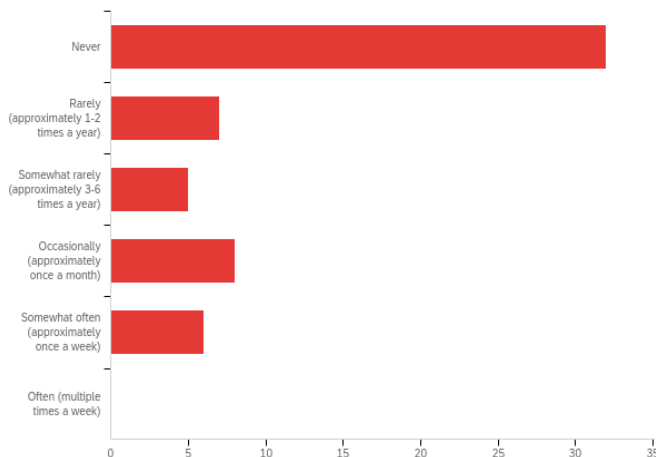


Figure 11: Results of question 20 of the Qualtrics survey.

The 21st question of the survey was an attention check which asked participants to type out the word ORANGE. 59 participants responded to this question, and all typed the word ORANGE with slight variations in capitalization.

Question 22 of the survey asked participants if they feel that more could be done to support students through mental health crises. 58 participants responded to this survey question. 39 participants (67%) responded yes, two participants responded no (3.5%), and 17 participants (29%) responded that they were unsure.

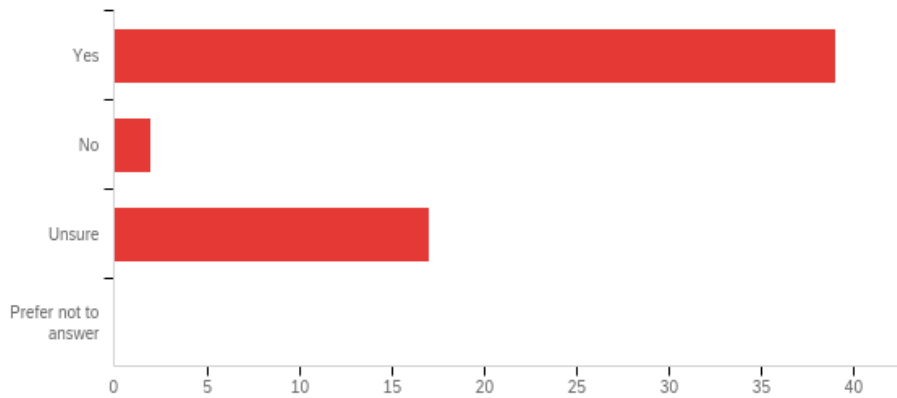


Figure 12: Results of question 22 of the Qualtrics survey.

Question 23 of the Qualtrics survey asked participants what they wish they knew about protecting their mental health and well-being as well as their peers' prior to beginning their first year at university. 42 participants responded to this survey question. Their responses were sorted into the following categories: how to talk to others, prioritize your mental health, what are the resources available, how to use available resources, find hobbies/stay busy, and various unique responses. 13 participants (31%) indicated that they wish they knew to prioritize their mental health and seven (17%) participants wished they knew how to use resources available to them. 10 participants (24%) provided various unique responses. These responses included, "BGSU

does not have the resources to actually help; there are no nearby therapists either” and “That moving off campus would be so helpful for my mental health” along with other responses.

Table 4: Survey participant responses to question 23 of the Qualtrics survey.

Categories	Number of Participants Identified
How to Talk to Others	7
Prioritize Your Mental Health	13
What are the Resources Available	3
How to Use Available Resources	7
Find Hobbies/Stay Busy	2
Various Unique Responses	10

Question 24 asked participants how confident they feel in their ability to have an effective dialogue about mental health. 58 participants responded to this survey question. 14 participants (24%) indicated that they feel extremely confident, 22 participants (38%) indicated that they feel confident, 16 participants (28%) indicated that they feel somewhat confident, and six participants (10%) indicated that they are not confident.

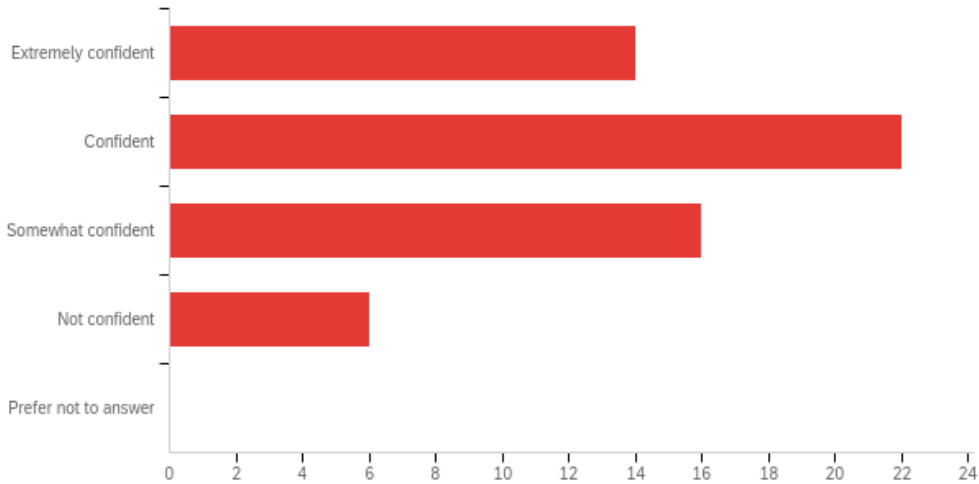


Figure 13: Results of question 24 of the Qualtrics survey.

For the 25th question, participants were asked to identify what, if any, information and/or education do they feel they lack in the realm of mental health and well-being. 30 participants responded to this question of the survey. Their responses were sorted into the following categories: lack of experience/comfort, how to talk to others and help/recognize when they are struggling, how to build one’s confidence, what resources are available, unsure, and various unique responses. Many of the responses indicated a lack of foundational knowledge of what mental health crises are and how to address them, such as the response that stated, “How to handle serious mental health situations such as panic or anxiety attacks”. 12 participants (40%) indicated a lack of understanding on how to talk to others and help/recognize when they are struggling, three participants (10%) indicated a lack of experience/comfort with the topic, three participants (10%) indicated a lack of understanding of what resources are available, and four participants (13%) provided unique responses, such as “the medical aspect of what the brain undergoes or what can cause mental health issues”.

Table 5: Survey participant responses to question 25 of the Qualtrics survey.

Categories	Number of Participants Identified
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Experience/Comfort	3
How to Talk to Others and Help/Recognize When They are Struggling	12
How to Build One's Confidence	3
What Resources are Available	3
Unsure	5
Various Unique Responses	4

The 26th survey question asked participants to identify which year in their undergraduate career do they feel they experienced the most challenges to their mental health. 56 participants responded to this survey question. Over half of the participants (37, 66%) indicated their first year. 10 participants (18%) indicated their second year and nine (16%) indicated their third year. No participants selected fourth year or fifth year or beyond.

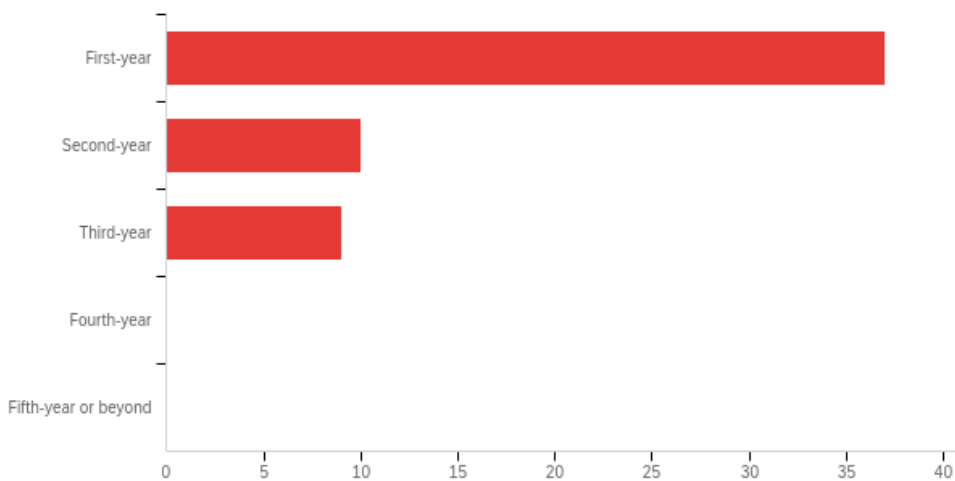


Figure 14: Survey participant responses to question 26 of the Qualtrics survey.

The 27th and final question of the survey asked participants to indicate why they selected the year they did in question 26. 51 participants responded to this survey question. Their

responses were sorted into the following categories: relationships, COVID-19 pandemic, roommates, balancing responsibilities, new environment/transition, only a first-year student, and various unique responses. 17 participants (33%) identified that the year they identified was the hardest as it was a new environment/transition and 10 participants (20%) indicated that this is the first year as a university student, so it is all they know.

Table 6: Survey participant responses to question 27 of the Qualtrics survey.

Category	Number of Participants Identified
Relationships	3
COVID-19 Pandemic	6
Roommates	4
Balancing Responsibilities	6
New Environment/Transition	17
Only a First-Year Student	10
Various Unique Responses	4

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSION

The results of this research and the survey responses have a great ability to be applied in the future, specifically in the ways that universities support their students through their transition from high school to university. Additional research, at a larger scale, is still needed to determine precisely how to ease the difficulty of this major life transition. This research, however, has shown that attending university causes many students to face challenges to their mental health and well-being and identified some of the common stressors that first-year students face. Most commonly, students were found to be challenged by developing anxiety, depression, newfound academic stress, and loneliness. When evaluating how students found aid in alleviating these struggling, confiding in a support system, and relying on multiple coping mechanisms, such as seeing a therapist/psychiatrist, beginning medication, and engaging in hobbies, such as working out, were useful. The students that participated in this research indicated that they feel confident in speaking with their peers about mental health challenges but additional help from outside resources would make such conversations easier for them. They indicated that when aiding a peer struggling with their mental health, they would be compassionate, willing to listen, and provide additional support resources when they felt that their own experiences and advice were not enough.

The target of this research was to identify how transitioning from high school to university impacted students' mental health and through this research, as well as extensive literature review on past studies, it is shown that this transition causes students to struggle with their mental health. Specifically, this research identified the most common causes for such struggles which are that the students are being placed in a new environment and feel alone/do not feel that they fit in. Several participants discussed how living in a dorm room within a residence

hall with roommates was a large challenge for them. For example, when asked to identify what the most challenging aspect of their first year on campus was, one participant identified it as, “Living with somebody you aren't comfortable with”. An important aspect of this research was to also determine how students dealt with such challenges as well as their knowledge and use of the resources available to them. The Counseling Center at Bowling Green State University was noted to be the most known resource but was not widely used by students, in fact, several participants indicated personal challenges with the Counseling Center. Examples of these challenges included responses such as, “All therapy resources are always booked and not taking new clients” and “I wanted to participate in the counseling services but the lady on the phone explained to me that if I wasn't about to off myself she couldn't help me because it was late in the semester. Therefore I didn't find it effective at all because I was unable to get the help I desperately needed”. It is important to note here that those who were able to use the Counseling Center did find it effective but there is a clear problem in how students are able to access the resources available to them.

The results of this survey indicate that there is more that can be done to support all university students, but the first-year students in particular, through mental health crises. When participants were asked about what they wish they had more education on in relation to this topic, many indicated that they felt they lacked understanding on how to prioritize mental health, how to talk to others, and how to use available resources. Many of them also noted that they struggled with knowing “how to intervene in an actual crisis” and “what kinds of problems people face, symptoms of those problems, how to directly help people facing those problems”.

When looking towards the future, making discussions on mental health and well-being should be a central topic that takes place prior to first-year students beginning their time at

university, whether this be during their Orientation or within the classroom. Not only should mental health conversations be more commonplace, but universities need to make it a priority to ensure that all students know exactly how to access resources available to them and make these resources more easily accessible.

One way that I, and this project, are contributing to providing students with educational resources for them to utilize at their leisure is with the production of a Google Classroom. This resource outlines the results of this study to provide students with an understanding that the challenges that they are facing to their mental health at university are challenges that other students are also facing and that they are not struggling alone. It also details various strategies and resources that students have available to them, as well as information on what mental illness may look like so that they can recognize these illnesses in themselves and others. While the research conducted for this study focused only on current students at Bowling Green State University, the resources and strategies found in the Google Classroom are applicable to any student at any university. The link to this virtual resource is:

<https://classroom.google.com/c/NjA0MTIxNjI0NDYz?cjc=aufwlbp>

To summarize the results of this project, our first-year university students are facing challenges to their mental health brought on by the transition to university. These challenges are causing them to struggle with academics, fitting in, and overall, feeling confident in themselves as a university student. Increasing students' abilities to cope with such challenges and ensure that students are aware of what resources they have available to them, as well as how to use such resources, has the potential to make a significant difference in the experience that students have at university and in protecting their mental health. This project's goal has been accomplished by providing a meaningful contribution to the current available data on the effect that the transition

from high school to university has on students' mental health. From this study alone, no definitive conclusions can be drawn but when combined with other research on the topic, it may help to provide a better understanding of how becoming a student at a university impacts students' mental health and well-being and how universities can help address the challenges that their students face.

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APPENDIX A

The survey questions below are as they appeared to participants.

Question 1

What year are you currently in as an undergraduate student?

First-year

Second-year

Third-year

Fourth-year

Fifth-year or beyond

Question 2

Have you suffered from challenges to your mental health since attending university?

Yes, I currently struggle

Yes, I have struggled

No, I have never struggled

Unsure

Prefer not to answer

Question 3

If you answered yes to the above question, please describe what such challenges you faced and what, if anything, did you find helped alleviate the challenges you faced?

Question 4

If you answered no to the above question, please indicate what you did, if anything, that allowed you to avoid challenges to your mental health and well-being.

Question 5

How often do you face challenges to your mental health as a university student?

Never

Rarely (approximately 1-2 times a year)

Somewhat rarely (approximately 3-6 times a year)

Occasionally (approximately once a month)

Somewhat often (approximately once a week)

Often (multiple times a week)

Question 6

Have you or do you currently know a university student suffering from challenges to their mental health?

Yes, I know someone currently

Yes, I have known someone who previously struggled with their mental health

No, I have never known someone

Unsure

Prefer not to answer

Question 7

If a peer were to confide in you that they were struggling with their mental health today, would you feel confident in your ability to help them?

Yes

With additional help

No

Unsure

Prefer not to answer

Question 8

How would you approach a peer that confides in you about their mental health challenges?

Question 9

The following question is an attention check: Which of the following is a vegetable?

Pizza

Cheeseburger

Cake

Broccoli

Candy

Question 10

As a first-year student, do/did you feel prepared to face the potential mental health challenges that may arise while at university?

Yes

With additional help

No

Unsure

Prefer not to answer

Question 11

As a first-year student, how often do/did you face challenges to your mental health as a university student?

Never

Rarely (approximately 1-2 times a year)

Somewhat rarely (approximately 3-6 times a year)

Occasionally (approximately once a month)

Somewhat often (approximately once a week)

Often (multiple times a week)

Question 12

What do/did you find to be the most challenging aspects of attending university as a first-year student in regard to your mental well-being?

Question 13

What on-campus mental health and wellness resources were you aware of as a first-year student?

	Click to write Column 1	
	Was Aware	Was Not Aware
Counseling Center	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Individual Counseling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Group Counseling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relationship Counseling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Drug and Alcohol Educational Programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Resident Advisors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The THRIVE Initiative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accessibility Services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wellness Connection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Question 14

If you were aware of additional on-campus mental health and wellness resources that as a first-year student that was not included above, please list them below.

Question 15

What, if any, on-campus mental health and wellness resources do/did you use as a first-year student?

	Click to write Column 1	
	Used	Did Not Use
Counseling Center	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Individual Counseling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Group Counseling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relationship Counseling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Drug and Alcohol Educational Programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Resident Advisors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The THRIVE Initiative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accessibility Services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wellness Connection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Question 16

If you use/used any additional on-campus mental health and wellness resources that were not included above as a first-year student, please list them below.

Question 17

If you used the mental health and wellness services available, how effective do you believe they were?

N/A as I did not use any mental health services

Not effective

Somewhat effective

Effective

Extremely effective

Question 18

If you used multiple mental health and wellness resources, which did you find to be the most effective and why?

Question 19

If you used multiple mental health and wellness resources, which did you find to be the least effective and why?

Question 20

How often did you use mental health and wellness resources?

Never

Rarely (approximately 1-2 times a year)

Somewhat rarely (approximately 3-6 times a year)

Occasionally (approximately once a month)

Somewhat often (approximately once a week)

Often (multiple times a week)

Question 21

The following question is an attention check: Please type the word ORANGE below.

Question 22

Do you believe there is more that could be done to support students through mental health crises?

Yes

No

Unsure

Prefer not to answer

Question 23

What do you wish you knew about protecting your mental health and the mental health of your peers prior to beginning university?

Question 24

How confident do you feel about your ability to have an effective dialogue regarding mental health?

Extremely confident

Confident

Somewhat confident

Not confident

Prefer not to answer

Question 25

What information and/or education do you feel that you lack, if any, regarding mental health and well-being?

Question 26

Which year of your undergraduate career do you feel that you have experienced the most challenges to your mental health?

First-year

Second-year

Third-year

Fourth-year

Fifth-year or beyond

Question 27

Why was the year in university that you identified above the most challenging to your mental health and wellness?