

Targeting the Gap in Mental Health Advocacy in First-Year College Students

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Research Question(s)

How do university students feel about the current mental health support systems in place and how did the transition from high school to attending university impact the mental health and well-being of first-year students?

Methodology: Project Overview

A Qualtrics survey was produced with 27 anonymous questions, ranging from identifying what challenges to their mental health and well-being participants faced during their first year at BGSU to what wellness resources they used.

Participant responses were recorded and analyzed to then produce a virtual resource containing the survey results and specific resources for them to use.

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

Methodology: Justification

- *Understanding the impact that the transition from high school and university has on the mental health and well-being of first year students is an understudied topic.*
- *In order to understand why this transition is detrimental to students' mental health, a survey needed to be used to understand what challenges current students indicate they faced and how they, potentially, alleviated such challenges.*
- *Understanding the challenges is just the first step. Creating a resource and identifying key areas of necessary improvement allows universities to take a step in the right direction.*



Methodology: Interdisciplinarity

- *Data collection via survey*
- *Research fundamentals*
- *Psychology*
- *Health and wellness*
- *Data analysis*
- *Computer science*

Conclusions

- *Attending university does cause first-year students to experience challenges to their mental health (84% of participants indicated struggling with mental health since beginning university).*
 - *66% of participants indicated that they experienced the most challenges to their mental health during their first year.*
 - *Most commonly, they experienced anxiety and depression, academic stress, and loneliness.*
- *Participants indicated that they sought relief in their support system and a combination of coping skills.*
- *Participants do feel confident in their ability to help peers but would prefer additional support when doing so.*
- *The most significant challenge to a first-year students' mental health and well-being was being in a new environment and being alone/fitting in (50%).*

Conclusions (cont.).

- *While the Counseling Center on campus was the most known resource (91%), it was not widely used (29%).*
 - *In fact, many of the known and available resources on campus are not being used by students.*
 - *However, those that are using such resources are finding them to be effective.*
- *Participants indicate that there is more that can be done to support university students through mental health crises (67%).*
 - *In particular, participants identified needing more information on how to prioritize mental health, how to appropriately talk to others and recognize symptoms of mental health challenges, and how to use the resources that are available.*

Project Strengths

- *Survey was presented to all current undergraduate students at BGSU to get a diverse population of participants (years, backgrounds, etc.).*
- *Addressed a topic with a current gap in knowledge in existing research.*
 - *It is also a topic that undergraduate students at universities are facing daily.*
- *Provides a virtual resource for students from any and all universities to use.*

Project Limitations

- *Responses from participants were limited so the results do not fully represent the entirety of the undergraduate population.*
 - *70 total participants with an initial goal of 10% of the undergraduate population (350 participants).*
- *Each survey question was not mandatory, so response percentages varied and did not provide much elaboration on issues they faced (such as the written questions).*
- *The results of the survey cannot be used to make assumptions or draw statistically significant conclusions.*
 - *They can only be used for further understanding due to limited sample size.*

Additional Information

- *It is important to note that mental health still carries a stigma and creating a welcoming environment for students to access resources on campus while facing a drastic transition is necessary.*
- *Though on campus resources are available, students are not widely using them indicating a lack of understanding on how to use them and/or a level of discomfort in using them.*

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