

ISSUE BRIEF:

Mandatory Mental Health Training among the Student Population

The College of William & Mary

Context: I am the Director of Student Care Concern at the college of William & Mary (less than 10000 students), writing to the Vice President of Student Affairs. This college has never implemented mandatory mental health training among the student population.

TO: Vice President for Student Affairs

FROM: Director of Student Care Concern

DATE: March 4, 2024

SUBJ: Mandatory Mental Health Training among the Student Population

### **Introduction to the Issue**

The debate over mandatory mental health training for college students has sparked controversy. Supporters argue it improves well-being, retention, academic success, and reduces stigma. The debate weighs the benefits of universal psychosocial education against the disadvantages. Policymakers must weigh the benefits against the burden on colleges.

### **Argument Supporting the Position**

A supportive and informed campus can help reduce the incidence of serious mental health crises. Prevention of harmful consequences is possible through early intervention and education. Mandatory programs on mental health awareness equip students with relevant information for them to identify symptoms of severe illness and be ready to seek aid, thus reducing cases of student mental health emergencies (Farley, 2023). Forcing students to participate helps schools send a clear signal that they consider mental health important and worth open negotiation as well as a collective effort. This approach is instrumental in breaking down stereotypes associated with mental health, thus allowing for an inclusive and compassionate campus culture (Fan, 2023). In this scenario, it is more possible for scholars to speak out about their past ordeals and consult with others, thereby enhancing togetherness among them. Thus, mandatory mental health awareness programs are not merely educational initiatives but are integral to cultivating a campus culture that champions mental wellness, inclusivity, and mutual support.

## **Argument Opposing the Position**

Opponents of compulsory mental health awareness initiatives in tertiary institutions have raised concerns about the practical consequences of such programs. For opponents, these programs are a major burden financially and administratively. To facilitate the introduction of mandatory mental health learning in all colleges, substantial resources must be devoted to program creation, facilitator training, and follow-up as well (Farley, 2023). They argue that such funds could have been used to improve direct student mental health services like counseling and therapy, which are much more useful for those who need them immediately.

The effectiveness of mandatory programs in involving students and promoting mental health awareness and activism is under scrutiny. The fear is that obligatory participation may foster dislike or disinterest among the students instead of an atmosphere for real learning and openness. The program's effectiveness has become doubtful, with critics stating that coerced involvement cannot result in genuine consciousness and change (Vander Putten, 2022). This resistance from students could inadvertently undermine the very objectives these programs aim to achieve, suggesting that voluntary participation might be a more effective approach to promoting mental health education on campuses. Ultimately, what should be done is find ways to aid student mental health most efficiently, with opponents calling for more focused and optional resource allocation and program implementation efforts.

## **My Position on the Issue**

My stand strongly backs mandatory mental health education programs in colleges and universities that are meant to tackle a growing mental health crisis among higher education students. This is a crisis characterized by increasing instances of anxiety, depression, and other forms of mental illness. This calls for an all-inclusive approach that guarantees every student

receives the necessary information and resources on this subject (Pan & Yeh, 2023). At the same time, there are valid concerns about the financial implications and challenges to the effectiveness of such ventures. I still believe that there is more significance in terms of overall advantages compared to these issues. The implementation of full-scale compulsory mental health programs can significantly improve students' health status, result in academic excellence, and establish an affirmative and welcoming environment at school. They must be creatively designed for educational purposes to be used for raising awareness as well as developing skills and strategies for improving their mental health.

To address concerns around student engagement and resistance, I suggest that we strategically employ peer educators and adopt interactive learning formats. For example, various workshops or simulations could help learners apply knowledge gained from lessons to real-life situations so they can take note of how their thoughts change while at it (Vander Putten, 2022). In addition, through dynamic interactions like during mandatory mental health awareness programs, potentially resistant groups can turn into constructive contributors. This would expand their spheres of influence both within and beyond the institution's boundaries.

### **Implications for Student Affairs Practice**

Implementing mental health awareness requirements in higher education is crucial for a comprehensive approach to student welfare and handling student affairs. This will necessitate those who work in student affairs to think beyond their departments or units and, therefore, collaborate with other stakeholders (Vander Putten, 2022). It is through this cross-functional teamwork that programs fit into individualized academic contexts while at the same time addressing the needs of all learners.

From a holistic perspective, various wellness-oriented support services on campus should incorporate mental health awareness. This means that the organizations must ask themselves what else could be done to introduce mental health education into their daily efforts, such as orientation programs, residential life initiatives, and other projects aimed at promoting students' well-being (Vander Putten, 2022). Other places, like medical facilities for undergraduates, where some have disseminated high levels of knowledge concerning mentally ill patients, may produce an effective response from learners aware of existing remedies available.

Additionally, successful implementation depends on continuous evaluation and research. For this reason, it is imperative for student affairs personnel to continuously evaluate these programs to gather data that may inform their redesign (Pan & Yeh, 2023). By doing this repeatedly, these plans would continue to be relevant while meeting the changes taking place within society, focusing on college students. A comprehensive analysis of student affairs practice can enhance mental health conditions among all students, highlighting progress made in addressing prevalent issues in higher education systems.

## **Conclusion**

Higher education institutions should create compulsory programs to address mental health crises on campuses, aiming to eliminate stigma, facilitate early intervention, and improve campus climate. Despite cost and logistical concerns, investing in these services is worthwhile for student well-being and academic achievement.

## References

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