

---

## NEW COLLEGE STUDENT PORTAL ADDRESSES MENTAL HEALTH EPIDEMIC

---

### COLLEGES IN CRISIS

Today's college students face a unique set of challenges. Over the past decade college enrollment has significantly outpaced counseling capacity. In addition, the American College Counseling Association states that today's students are arriving on campus more stressed than ever before. The combination of increased academic pressure, ballooning student loan debts and the pressure to be "fine" have resulted in 50% of college students reporting stress levels to a point of not being able to function. Add in a systemic lack of resilience and it's no surprise that one in three college freshmen does not return for their sophomore year.



50% OF COLLEGE  
STUDENTS REPORTING  
STRESS LEVELS TO A  
POINT OF **NOT BEING  
ABLE TO FUNCTION.**

These are more than just student problems. Suicides, sexual assaults and substance abuse affect the culture of a campus. Today's professors are spending more and more time acting as de-facto counselors. Not only is this a job they are not equipped to do, but it's a burden that detracts from their abilities to educate the rest of the student population. These issues are being reported by universities both small and large, all across the country. As universities search for answers, it's becoming increasingly clear that real solutions are nowhere in sight.



**YOU**

## THE GENESIS OF YOU

It seems like there's a new story published every week focusing on the challenges colleges are facing due to poor student health. With rising university enrollment, counseling needs have outpaced capacity at an alarming rate. According to statistics release by the American Association of Suicidology in 2015, suicide is the second leading cause for death amongst college-aged students. Colorado State University has not been immune to this pattern.

As CSU searched for answers, they developed a partnership with Cactus Marketing Communications, an ad agency with significant behavioral health experience. Cactus had recently developed and launched [Man Therapy](#), an early intervention mental health program designed to reduce male suicides. The portal's overwhelming success led to a conversation between Cactus and CSU to determine if Man Therapy could be the right solution the college crowd.

In 2014 Man Therapy was tested with a subset of the CSU population through a series of focus groups. Although students expressed the need for a digital platform for their mental health, the Man Therapy portal proved too narrow a platform to adequately serve the diverse college population. The most obvious deficiency being that Man Therapy is a male-specific mental health program and the college population is more than 50 percent female. In addition, focus groups simply did not connect with the main character, Dr. Rich Mahogany. Students reported that he was not relevant to the issues they faced during the first few years away from home.

**ONE THING THAT QUICKLY BECAME CLEAR IS THAT COLLEGE STUDENTS COULD BENEFIT FROM AN EARLY INTERVENTION MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM DESIGNED WITH THEIR ISSUES IN MIND.**

Plus, a custom-built digital portal could connect with students on their terms through laptops, tablets and smartphones. So Cactus walked away from Man Therapy as a solution and chose to start from scratch with the college crowd. A new problem called for a new team. Grit Digital Health was created to focus on developing a new solution for college mental health.

## PARTNERING WITH COLORADO STATE

Over an 18-month development period the Grit and CSU teams researched, concepted and created the YOU portal. During that time the team conducted 15 key informant interviews, 7 focus groups and made presentations to more than 200 CSU administrators, faculty, staff and students.



**YOU FOCUSES  
ON SERVING  
STUDENTS  
RATHER THAN  
JUST STUDENT  
PROBLEMS.**

Working directly with CSU faculty and staff led to the first major breakthrough — college mental health problems don't happen in a vacuum. Stress can lead to sleep issues, which can lead to self-medication with drugs and alcohol, which can lead to increased stress on academics and relationships. When students seek help for one specific issue it does little to help their overall well-being, despite opening the door for new conversations and exploration. This insight inspired Grit to develop a completely new student-centric approach to college mental health. YOU focuses on serving students rather than just student problems.

By working directly with Colorado State University, Grit identified a long list of valuable student resources to centralize and promote to students. Today's college students are digital natives. The first place they look for help is always on the web. Although valuable on their own, individual campus resources lack the ability to effectively address all aspects of student life. In addition to providing original content, the YOU portal aggregates and presents these campus resources with a cohesive look and feel. Not only does this benefit students, it benefits the faculty and staff, and thus, the university as a whole by simply connecting the people who need help with those who provide it. Plus, by connecting with students before the point of crisis, YOU reduces the strain on other student services, like counseling, which are struggling to keep up with campus demand.

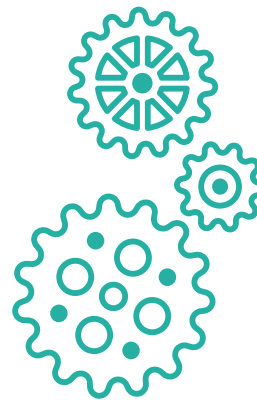
As a development partner, CSU leadership reviewed content and provided feedback at every step of the process. University stakeholders communicated their wishes for portal content and functionality and enhancements were made incorporating many of these suggestions. The partnership was formalized in a Master Development Research Agreement to allow a team of CSU research faculty to conduct a pilot study and examine the utility of the YOU portal among CSU students.

### THE SOLUTION IS YOU

Through the partnership with CSU, Grit learned that mental health, although important, is simply not attractive to the college population. Few students see their mental health as a problem. It's just not something they pay attention to. Therefore the YOU portal was designed around the idea of student success. The YOU portal helps students address the new challenges of college life before major damage is done. Something as simple as meeting the right mentor, getting involved in a campus organization or discovering a new passion can help provide a sense of direction

that puts students on the path to success.

YOU emphasizes individual well-being and self-awareness in order to connect students to information, campus resources, peers and opportunities. From academics and social life, to mental and physical health, YOU is a new kind of solution, focused on skill-building for overall wellness rather than specific deficiencies. Depending on the need, the want, or the will, students can connect with hundreds of pieces of content within each section of YOU. Students can also use the system-wide search function to locate the help they need at the moment they need it.



**YOU CONNECTS STUDENTS TO ON-CAMPUS AND ONLINE RESOURCES USING PERSONALIZATION AND BEST PRACTICES TO HELP STUDENTS LEAD PRODUCTIVE, WELL-BALANCED COLLEGE LIVES.**

This 360-degree digital tool is optimized for both desktop and mobile viewing. That means it's available to students 24/7 with privacy and anonymity not normally associated with seeking help. YOU engages students on their terms and works by connecting with the whole student in three distinct areas of wellness.



### THRIVE – Physical & Mental Well-Being

Maintaining a sound mind and body are crucial to leading a balanced and fulfilling life. The THRIVE domain enables students to assess, sustain and proactively care for their health amidst the stress of college life.



### SUCCEED – Academic & Career Success

The typical barometer for collegiate success, the SUCCEED domain enables students to make commitments to perpetuate their existing successes as well as set future goals.



### MATTER – Purpose & Campus Connections

The MATTER domain helps students become aware of their connections to their peers, their friends and the campus, aiding them in discovering their passions and encouraging them to make healthy commitments for personal growth.

## HOW YOU WORKS

The YOU portal is designed to blend seamlessly with existing campus digital properties. Students gain entry to the site via their official university email address. To ensure privacy, YOU lives on a completely separate server from the host university, however by incorporating campus

brand standards and the .edu domain architecture, students are presented with a portal that appears to be an official university property. YOU learns about individual students through a series of Reality Check questionnaires as well as through a student's individual profile.



**THE MORE YOU  
LEARNS ABOUT A  
STUDENT, THE MORE  
RELEVANT AND  
PERSONALIZED  
CONTENT IT  
PROVIDES.**

## PORTAL RESEARCH AND PILOT RESULTS

After 18 months of development, the Grit team and CSU launched a pilot to study the YOU program on the CSU campus. The pilot provided approximately 1,500 select CSU students with access to the YOU portal for approximately 8 weeks during the Fall 2015 semester. At the end of the program students were invited to complete an online survey and select survey participants were invited to focus groups for a more detailed account of their experience.

Students were granted access to YOU via a single recruitment email. The pilot was not supported with any promotional tactics or follow-up communication. In spite of the lack of messaging, the portal received more than 1,000 unique visits averaged an impressive 6 minutes per individual. More than 200 students completed an online survey about their experiences, revealing an overwhelmingly positive reaction to YOU.



Nearly half of all visitors (49.7%) registered and completed their YOU profile.



More than 90% of students (185 of 204 surveyed) reported satisfaction with the YOU portal.



More than 85% of the 204 students surveyed described the portal as useful.



A majority of the students (51%) felt the YOU portal was engaging and easy to understand.



A majority of the students (58%) liked the format and found YOU easy to navigate.



Student satisfaction averaged 65% across all three YOU domains (THRIVE, SUCCEED AND MATTER).



35% of students reported that they did something new or checked out a CSU resource based on the results of their Reality Check.

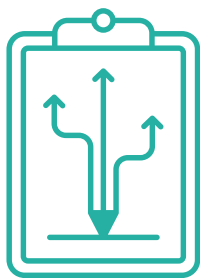
Despite the overall enthusiasm for YOU, the survey also revealed areas where the portal could improve. Students expressed a desire for different and interactive ways to communicate with the portal in the moment, as opposed to simply relying on data stored in the Reality Checks. Students also asked for even more customized content, particularly with regard to their year in school and their major. Graduate and professional students also expressed interest in a more personalized experience specific to their stressors. Students indicated they would like to see content periodically refreshed to pull them back into the portal, especially around specific times throughout the academic year (e.g., final exams, holiday breaks, etc.) Finally, students requested features allowing for greater social interaction within the portal. Suggestions included a daily question with live results as well as the highlighting the most popular cards among the student body.

## WHAT'S NEXT

The effectiveness of the YOU portal on college campus will continue to be evaluated. The more students access the YOU portal, the more information is available to guide the site's development. This data can be broken down by student year, type of student, point in the semester and more to further improve YOU's usefulness. The inherent flexibility of the YOU portal allows administrators to easily incorporate new data to dial in the content to better serve today's college students.



THE SYSTEM ALSO PROVIDES **QUANTITATIVE DATA ON WHICH SUBJECTS STUDENTS ARE MOST FREQUENTLY SEARCHING**, HELPING SCHOOL LEADERS UNDERSTAND FUTURE RESOURCE NEEDS.



WHILE THE COST  
OF IMPLEMENTING  
THE YOU PROGRAM  
IS FIXED, **THE  
POTENTIAL VALUE  
IS IMPOSSIBLE TO  
FULLY MEASURE.**

## WHY YOU

In addition to serving as an upstream college wellness portal, YOU provides a platform for universities to learn about the issues facing their student body like never before. Increased student wellness benefits not only individual students, but the campus culture as a whole. As YOU continues to evolve, the potential benefits are limitless.

**However, when it comes to student health, one thing that has become clear for universities across the country is the catastrophic cost of doing nothing.**

---

inquiries@gritdigitalhealth.com  
720-407-8920  
[gritdigitalhealth.com](http://gritdigitalhealth.com)

## PRAISE FOR YOU

We believe YOU will prove to be an extraordinary asset for the students, faculty and staff of Colorado State University. While the tool is tailored to students, we believe it can be a valuable resource for our faculty and staff as they work with the student community.

### Tony Frank

President,  
Colorado State University

---

This is a phenomenal example of the strength of a public/private partnership where all parties share a passion for helping our current generation of students with a pressing social issue to improve mental health, coping, and resiliency skills.

### Blanche Hughes

Vice President For Student Affairs,  
Colorado State University

---

You@CSU is innovative new way of reaching students in their time, using their language diminishing shame and stigma related to seeking support.

### Anne Hudgens

Executive Director of the CSU Health Network,  
Colorado State University

---

YOU offers suggestions, tips, tools and resources based solely on what is important to the individual. Not what we think is important for them. That is very unique. Nobody likes to be told 'what to do.' YOU is different in how it asks students what they want to do and what they want to focus on.

### Janelle Patrias

Manager Of Mental Health Initiatives, CSU Health Network, Colorado State University