
Mental health is a concern for college campuses

By **Katherine Owen** on June 20, 2012 1:30 AM CST

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Mental health concerns are one of the top two public concerns faced by universities across the country, according to Michelle Harcrow, assistant director of mental health education and promotion for the Student Health Center.

A 2011 American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment found that 30 percent of college students reported feeling “so depressed it was difficult to function.”

Harcrow said the sources of anxiety on students are multi-faceted. She listed cultural stress, the driven mindset of today’s students, a lack of ability to handle stress and the competitive pressure in applying to and excelling in college as common causes.

“College is the most developmentally challenging time in a young person’s life because it’s the most transitional time,” she said.

Harcrow also said more students are coming to college with preexisting mental health concerns and those students are already on medications for such issues.

Emily Broman, a junior studying chemical engineering and psychology at the University of Alabama, agrees all college students have to deal with stress while going through school.

“I think we all have virtually the same sources of stress, and, of course, that comes from being in college and having a variety of demands, such as school, extracurricular activities and social lives,” Broman said. “But experiencing stress depends on how we deal with these demands.”

Broman said her own experience with stress fluctuates.

“Stress comes in bursts,” she said. “Sometimes it’s almost impossible to handle, and other times, I don’t have any at all.”

According to the ACHA-NCHA study, 49.9 percent of participants felt overwhelming anxiety, and 86.1 percent felt overwhelmed by all they had to do. A majority of students – 81.4 percent – also admitted to feeling exhausted, but not from physical activity.

Jennifer Turner, the coordinator of clinical services for the UA Counseling Center, said mental health issues amongst college age students are a “natural and normal part of the college experience... just as with the general population.”

Turner agreed the issues may stem from the college age group, the culture, college itself or a world with high expectations.

“It’s often the person’s inability to cope and the amount of stress that they feel with these different issues that may result in mental health concerns,” Turner said.

If a student is questioning their mental health or thinks they are struggling with a mental health issue, Turner suggests they seek out counseling.

“I would encourage them to call the counseling center and set an appointment to speak with one of our counselors. Students are also encouraged to go to our website, www.counseling.ua.edu and learn more about the services we offer.”