The Role of Faculty in Student Mental Health
Student mental health is one of the most significant challenges facing higher education.

- Coincides with age of onset for lifetime mental health disorders
- Rising prevalence in student populations
- 83% report mental health negatively affected their academic performance in the past 4 weeks
- Depression associated with two-fold increase in likelihood of dropping/stopping out of college, even when controlling for prior performance (test scores, high school grades)

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Faculty are uniquely positioned to recognize students in distress.

- 22 million young people enrolled in U.S. postsecondary education
- College systems are rich with human resources, providing opportunities for early intervention and prevention
- Potential for identifying students in distress through multiple channels
  - Peers
  - Student affairs and campus staff (residential life, athletics, etc.)
  - Faculty
Faculty are uniquely positioned to recognize students in distress.

- 22 million young people enrolled in U.S. postsecondary education
- College systems are rich with human resources, providing opportunities for early intervention and prevention
- Potential for identifying students in distress through multiple fewer channels
  - Peers
  - Student affairs and campus staff (residential life, athletics, etc.)
  - **Faculty: some of the only ones routinely seeing students during pandemic**
- Lack of research on faculty’s perceptions of and experiences with student mental health
  - New data needed to inform programs and resources
Survey Overview: 
The Role of Faculty in Student Mental Health

• Pilot study
• Data collected through Qualtrics: 1/25-3/10/21
• Four survey sections:
  • Faculty characteristics
  • Faculty knowledge and attitudes
  • Faculty experiences related to student mental health
  • Faculty wellbeing

12 colleges and universities
N=1,685 faculty members

Study made possible by Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, Mary Christie Foundation, Nina Cesare & Amber Talaski. Special thanks to these organizations & individuals!
Sample Characteristics

- N=1,685 faculty members
- Response rate: 27%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OUR SAMPLE</th>
<th>NATIONAL*</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>84.3%</td>
<td>83.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern or Arab American</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transgender/gender nonconforming/non-binary/self-identify gender</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Professor</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate professor</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant professor</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor/Lecturer</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other faculty**</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
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*National values from the National Center for Education Statistics, 2019
87% of faculty observe that student mental health has worsened in the pandemic.
~80% of faculty report having 1:1 conversations with students regarding mental health.

- 79.3% of faculty report having 1:1 phone, video, or email conversations with students in the past 12 months about student mental health

- Likelihood of mental health conversations varies by...
  - Faculty academic discipline
    - + social sciences, humanities, arts
    - - business, law, science, math
  - Faculty gender
    - + female, trans and nonbinary
    - - male
Three-quarters of faculty are likely to reach out if a student is in distress, but only half have a good idea of how to recognize this.

I have a good idea of how to recognize that a student is in emotional or mental distress.

If I think a student is experiencing emotional or mental distress, I am likely to reach out to that student.
Faculty do not want to “make students feel uncomfortable” and feel that “someone else is better suited.”

Which of the following are reasons why you would not reach out to a student if you thought they were experiencing emotional or mental distress?

- None, I would always reach out to a student if I thought they were experiencing emotional or mental distress (50%)
- I would not want to make the student feel uncomfortable (24%)
- Someone else is better suited to do this (21%)
- I worry I could make things worse (21%)
- I’m unsure of what to do/say to a student (20%)
- I don’t feel safe (9%)
- I would feel uncomfortable doing so (9%)
- I don’t have enough time (8%)
- It’s none of my business (5%)
- It’s not my responsibility (3%)
Faculty are even less confident recognizing signs of and having conversations about substance misuse.

- 29% agree/strongly agree they have a good idea how to recognize a student is experiencing signs of substance use disorder (vs. 51% re: student mental health)
- 38% agree/strongly agree they feel comfortable having conversations with students about substance use (vs. 64% re: student mental health)
  - + male
  - -female, trans and non-binary
Knowledge of institutional resources increases roughly linearly with experience.
Most faculty have not participated in a gatekeeper training program, but those who have, found it helpful.
Faculty welcome more resources to better support student mental health.

• 69% agree/strongly agree they are motivated to strengthen their role in supporting student mental health

• 73% agree/strongly agree they would welcome additional professional development on the topic of student mental health

• 61% agree/strongly agree it should be mandatory that all faculty receive basic training in how to respond to students experiencing mental or emotional distress

• Faculty would prefer trainings that are: online; offer advice for general student support instead of just crisis training; self-paced; ≤30 minutes

In addition to basic training, faculty want a:

• list of mental health resources available at their institutions
• checklist of things to consider regarding warning signs of mental or emotional distress
• small reference guide for how to initiate a conversation with a student
• statement on mental health to include in course syllabi
Future training and outreach must consider institutional climate.

- One-quarter of all faculty perceive the campus climate to be hostile/somewhat hostile towards students of color
  - 58% Hispanic or Latinx
  - 39% Black or African American

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Institutional Climate (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hostile</td>
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<td>---------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students of color</td>
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<tr>
<td>International students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual minority students (gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender minority students (transgender, genderqueer, non-binary)</td>
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Half of faculty report at least one symptom of major depression.

- 33% screen positive with $\geq 2$ cutoff
- 10% screen positive with $\geq 3$ cutoff
  - 20% Hispanic/Latinx
- 21% agree/strongly agree that supporting students in mental and emotional distress has taken a toll on their own mental health
  - 27% female, 32% trans and non-binary
  - 13% male
  - 33% Hispanic/Latinx
- 46% agree/strongly agree that their institution should invest more in supporting faculty mental health and wellbeing
- Only 30% agree/strongly agree that they know what mental health resources are available for faculty at their institutions
Summary and Next Steps

• Faculty play an enormous role in shaping student success
  • Personal connection with faculty member → higher student satisfaction and sense of belonging
  • Having supportive professor/advisor → higher retention
  • On the “front lines” in terms of being able to identify students in distress and refer them to help
• Majority of faculty have observed student mental health worsening in the pandemic
• Faculty are having conversations with students about mental health
• Have relatively low confidence to serve as “gatekeepers” and few have been trained
• Are welcoming of more resources
• Development and implementation of training programs (online, brief, mandatory) and resources (checklists, conversation guide, syllabi statements)
• Fall 2021: launching annual national survey of faculty (and staff) through Healthy Minds Network

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