

# The Role of Faculty in Student Mental Health



**MARY CHRISTIE**  
FOUNDATION



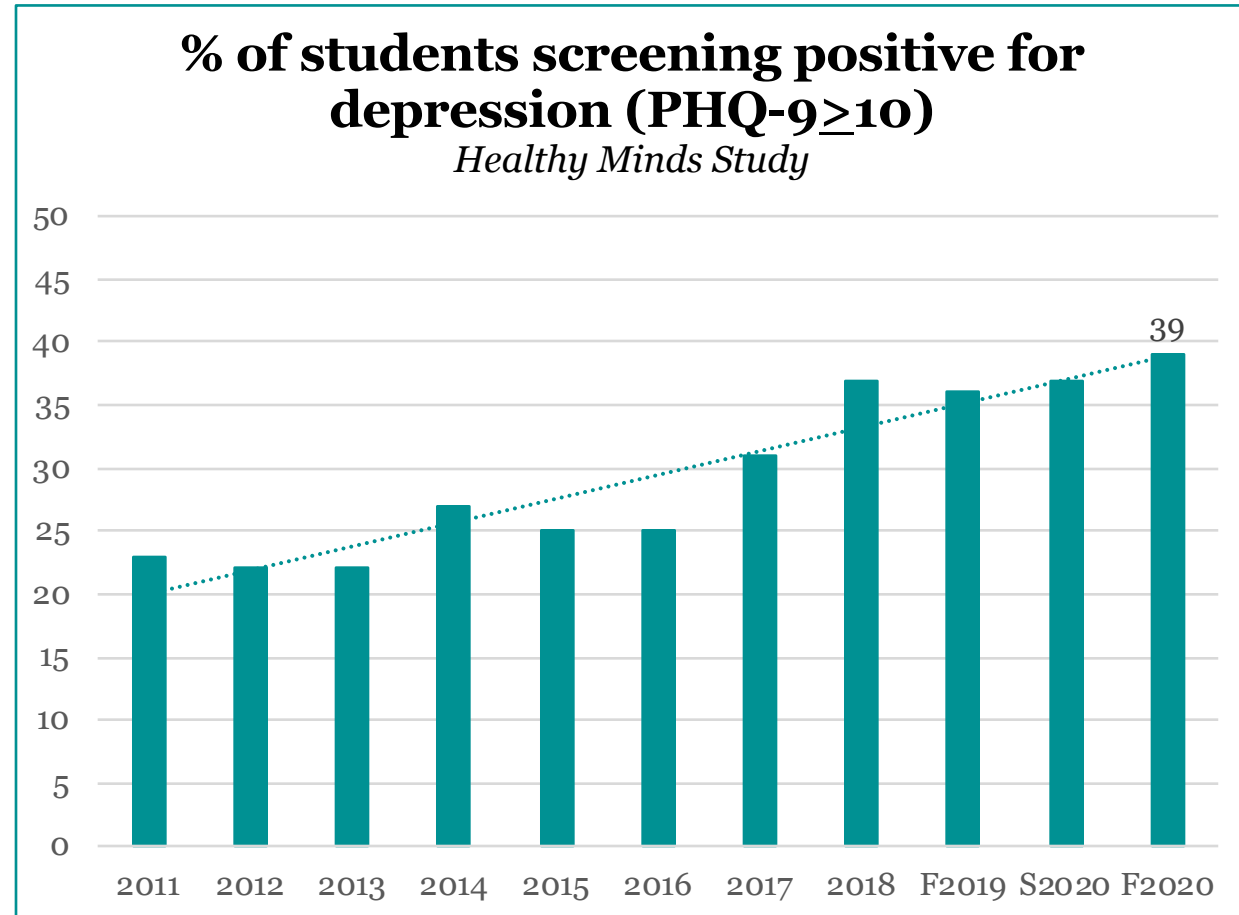
The  
Healthy  
Minds Network



**Hazelden Betty Ford**  
Foundation

# 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<sup>1</sup>
- 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)<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Fall 2020 Healthy Minds Study data (N=32,000 students on 36 campuses): <https://healthymindsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/HMS-Fall-2020-National-Data-Report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>Eisenberg et al. (2009). Mental Health and Academic Success in College. B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy 9(1) (Contributions): Article 40.

# 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

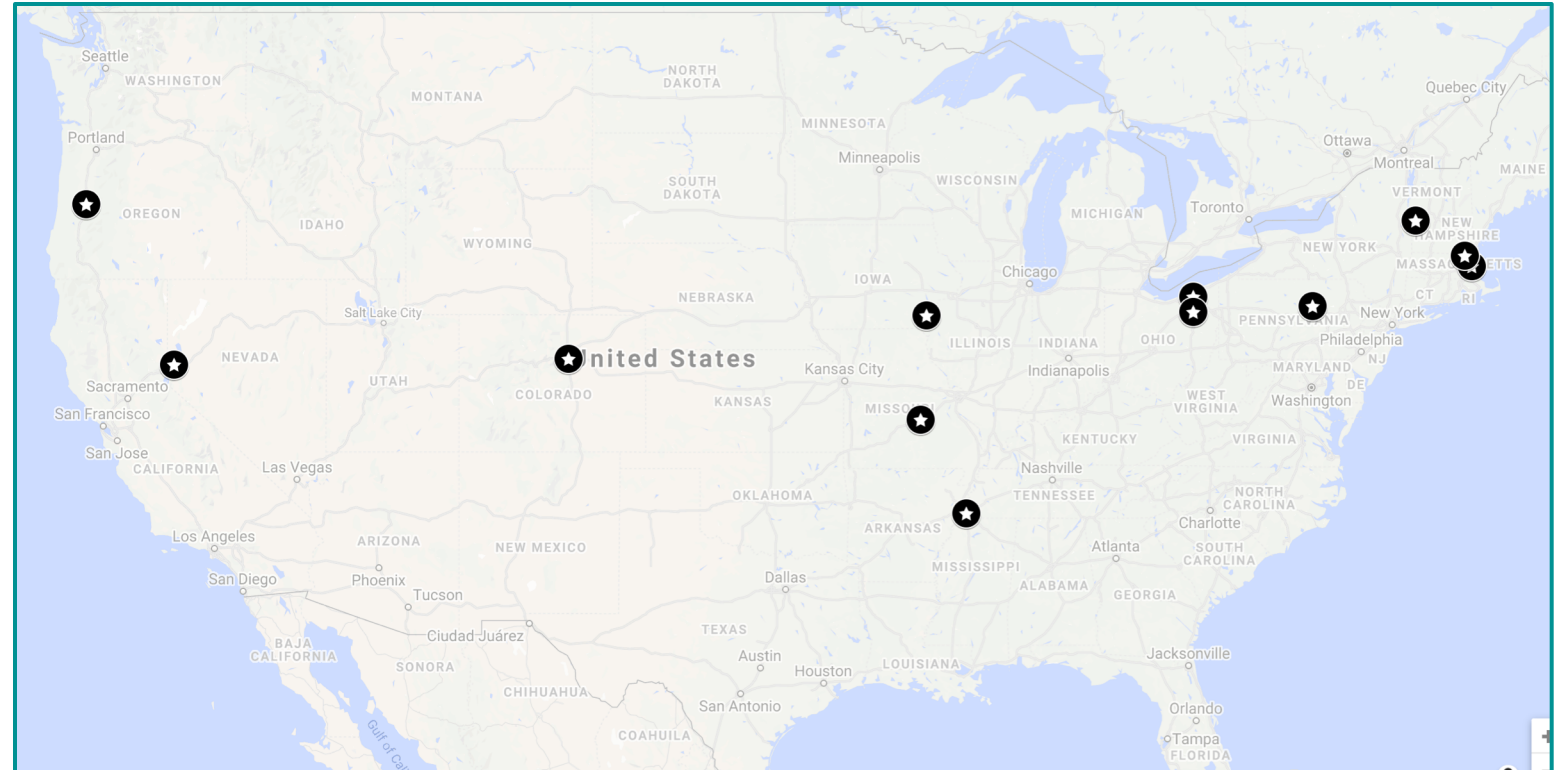
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- Potential for identifying students in distress through multiple fewer channels
  - Peers
  - Student affairs and campus staff (residential life, athletics, etc.)
  - **Faculty: some of the only ones routinely seeing students during pandemic**
- Lack 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

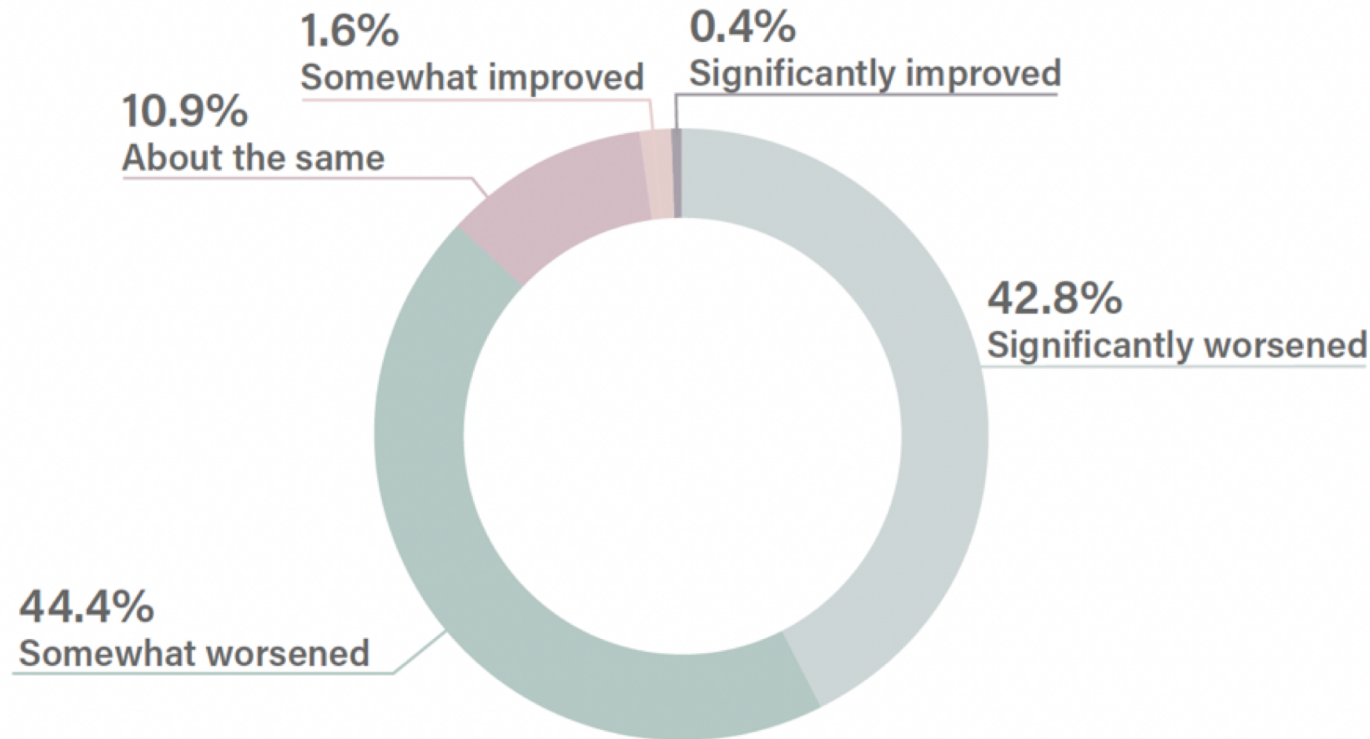
- N=1,685 faculty members
- Response rate: 27%

	OUR SAMPLE	NATIONAL*
<b>White</b>	84.3%	83.2%
<b>Black</b>	2.5%	1.9%
<b>Asian</b>	5.0%	2.3%
<b>Hispanic</b>	2.5%	3.9%
<b>Middle Eastern or Arab American</b>	1.0%	0.6%
<b>Multiracial</b>	2.5%	1.4%
<b>Male</b>	40.2%	53.8%
<b>Female</b>	57.9%	46.3%
<b>Transgender/gender nonconforming/ non-binary/self-identify gender</b>	1.8%	N/A
<b>Full Professor</b>	14.1%	22.6%
<b>Associate professor</b>	19.8%	19.6%
<b>Assistant professor</b>	16.9%	21.5%
<b>Instructor/Lecturer</b>	22.0%	17.5%
<b>Other faculty**</b>	27.2%	18.9%

*\*National values from the National Center for Education Statistics, 2019*

# 87% of faculty observe that student mental health has worsened in the pandemic.

FROM YOUR PRESPECTIVE, HOW IF AT ALL HAS STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH CHANGED SINCE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC BEGAN?

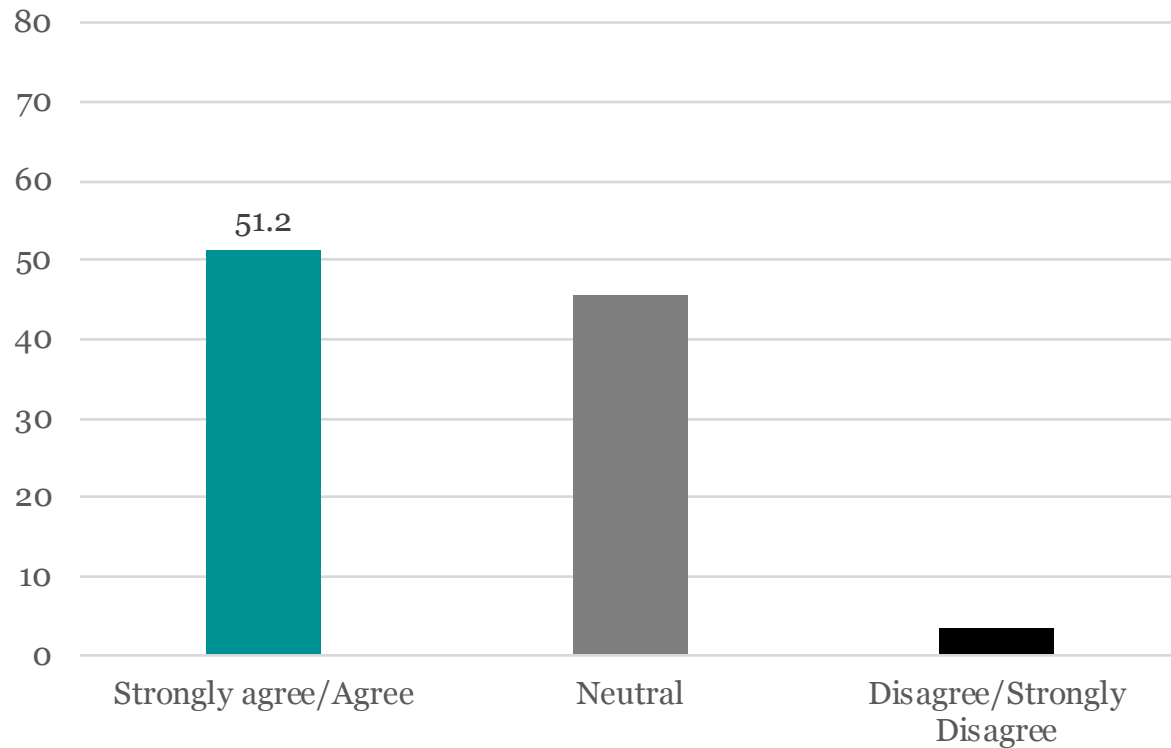


# **~80% of faculty report having 1:1 conversations with students regarding mental health.**

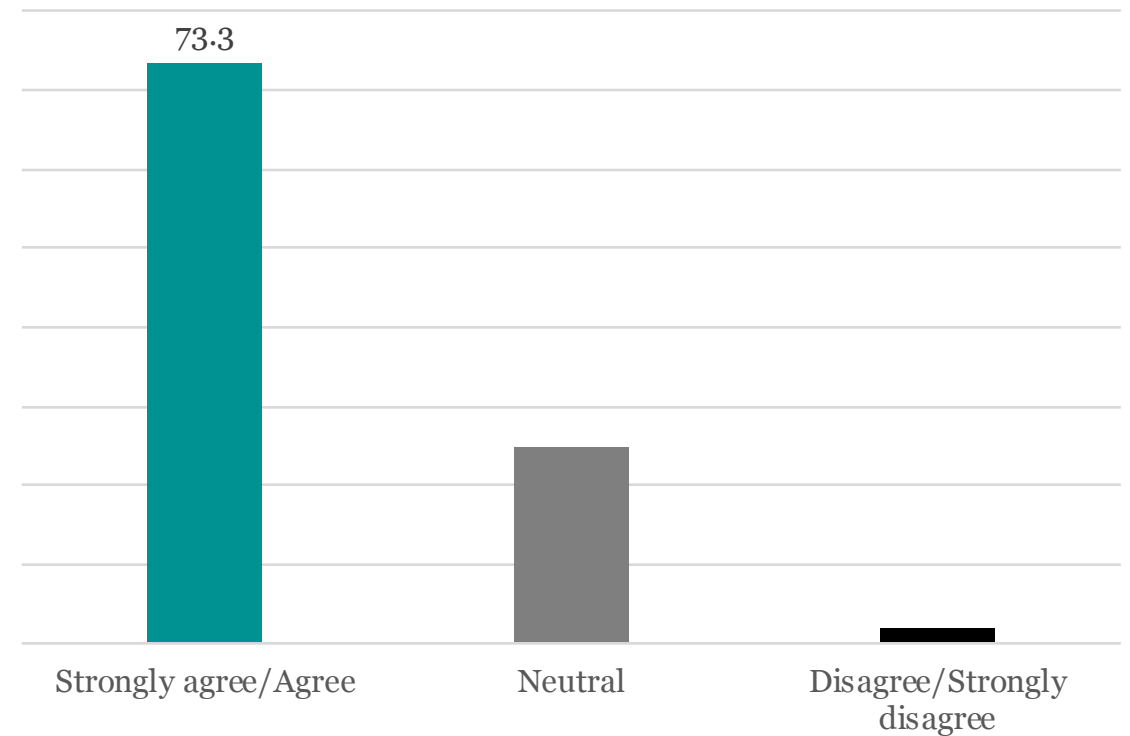
- 79.3% of faculty report having 1:1 phone, video, or email conversations with students in the past 12 months about student mental health
- Likelihood of mental health conversations varies by...
  - Faculty academic discipline
    - + social sciences, humanities, arts
    - - business, law, science, 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?***

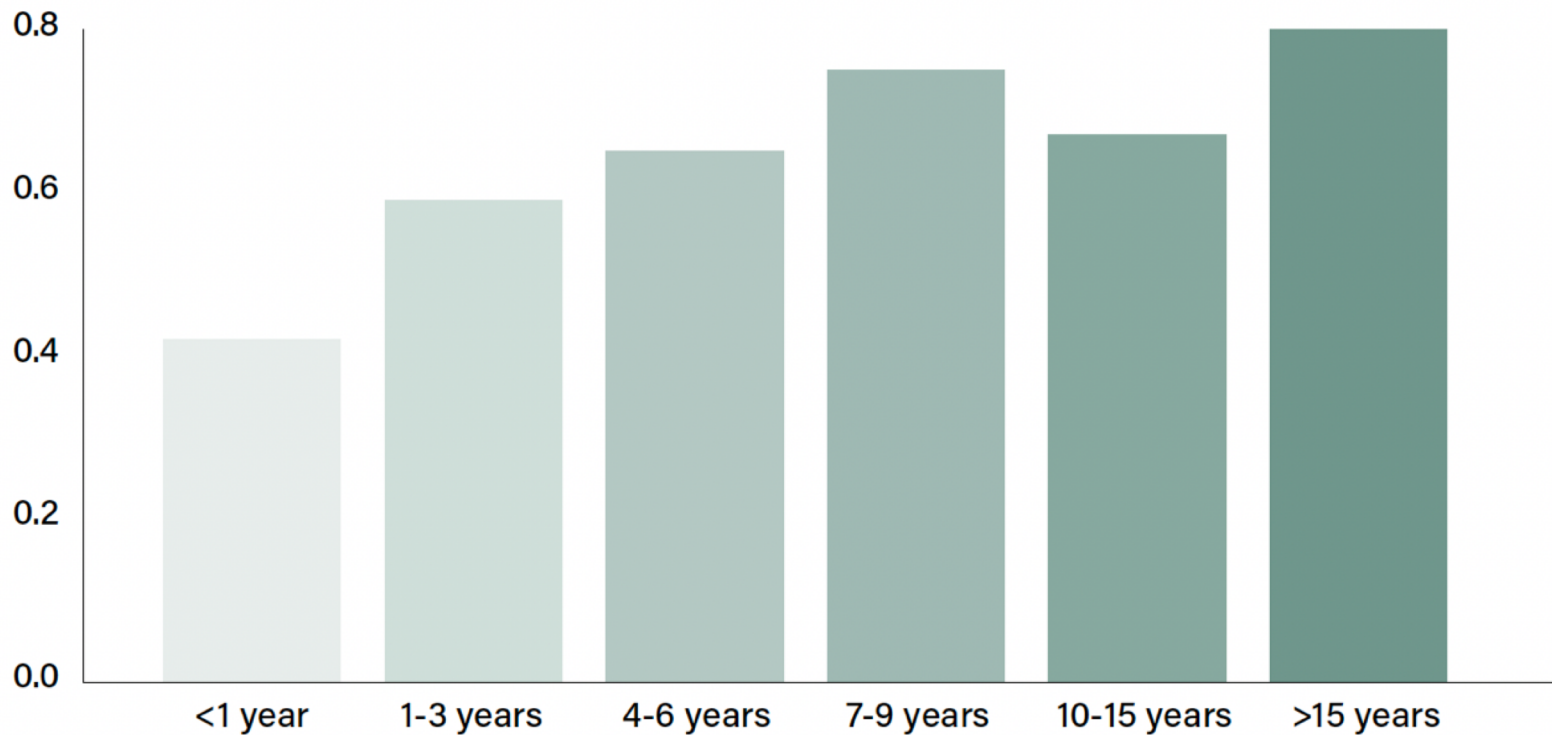
- None, I would always reach out to a student if I thought they were experiencing emotional or mental distress (50%)
- I would not want to make the student feel uncomfortable (24%)
- Someone else is better suited to do this (21%)
- I worry I could make things worse (21%)
- I’m unsure of what to do/say 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

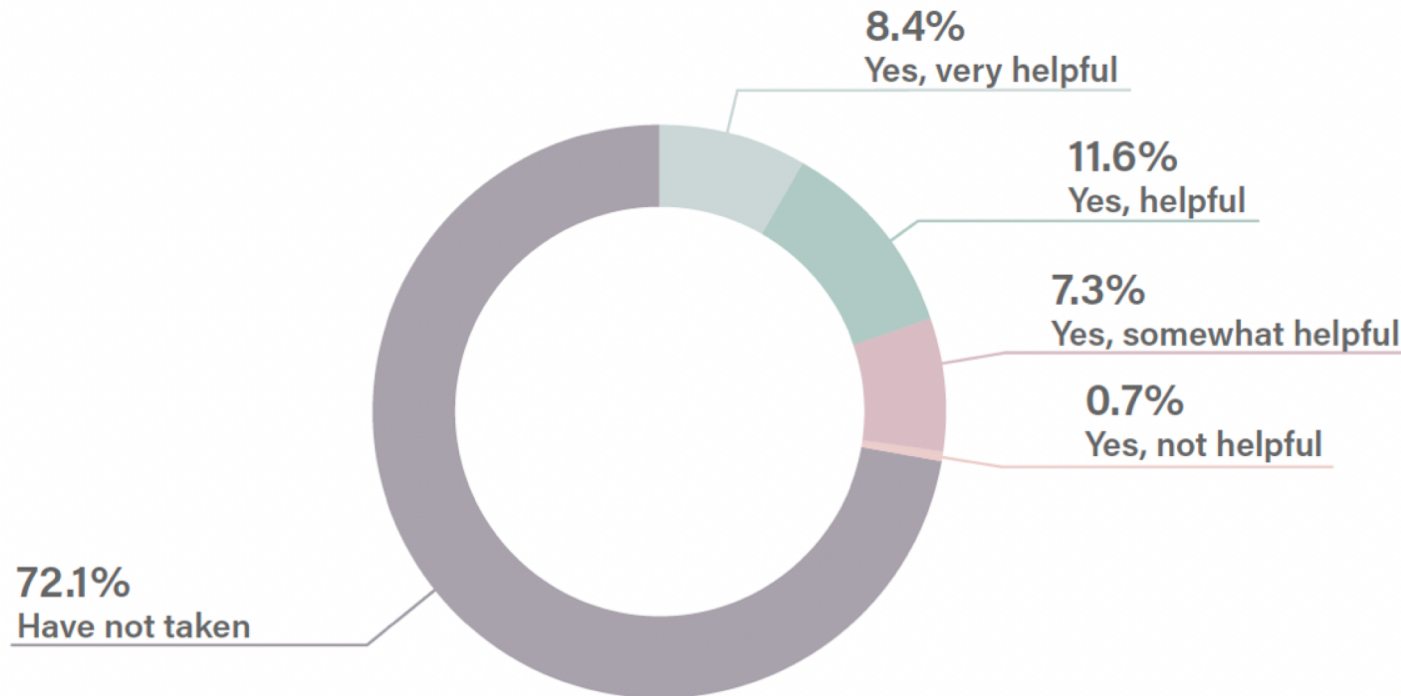
# Knowledge of institutional resources increases roughly linearly with experience.

I KNOW WHAT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES, IF ANY, ARE AVAILABLE FOR STUDENTS AT MY INSTITUTION



**Most faculty have not participated in a *gatekeeper training program*, but those who have, found it helpful.**

**FACULTY RESPONSES TO MENTAL HEALTH  
GATEKEEPER TRAINING**



# 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.

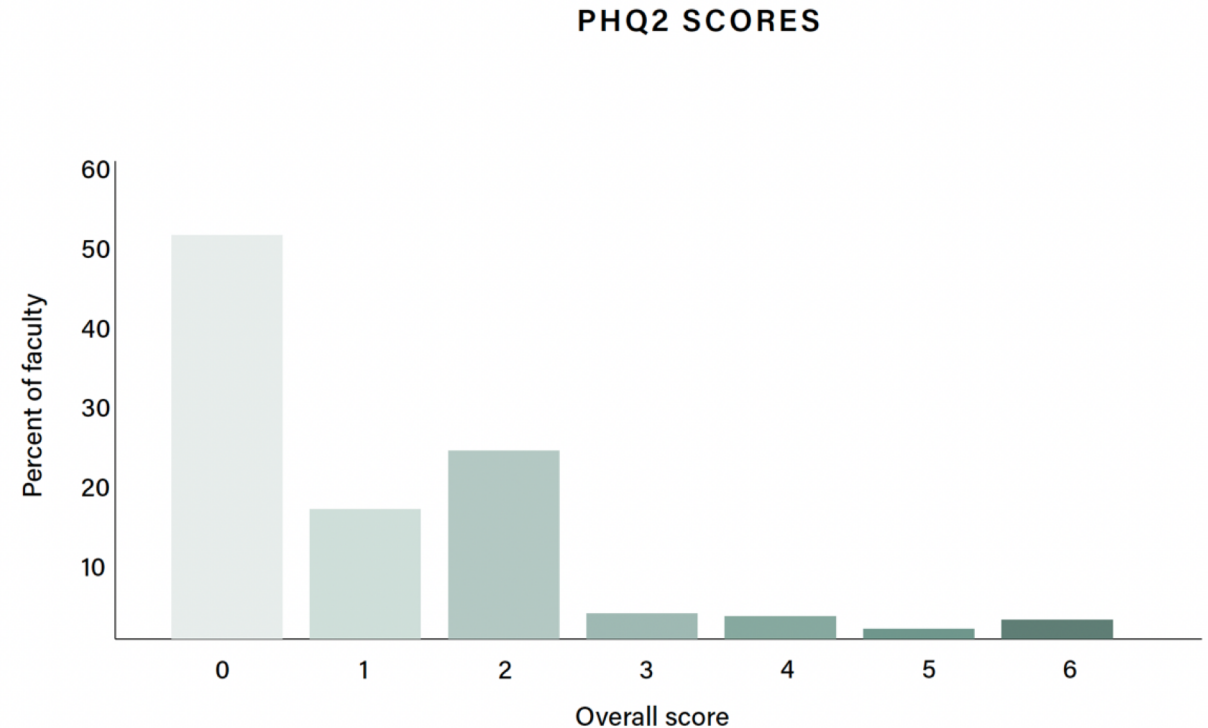
## PERCEPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL CLIMATE (%)

	HOSTILE	SOMEWHAT HOSTILE	NEUTRAL	SOMEWHAT WELCOMING	WELCOMING
<i>Please rate the climate at your institution in general for students from the following backgrounds:</i>					
<b>Students of color</b>	4.4	20.6	20.4	22.5	32.1
<b>International students</b>	2.5	15.1	22.5	25.9	34.0
<b>Sexual minority students (gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer)</b>	1.3	10.4	20.7	28.2	39.5
<b>Gender minority students (transgender, genderqueer, non-binary)</b>	2.5	14.2	22.0	27.8	33.6

- 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

# 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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Full data report available at: <https://marychristiefoundation.org/resources/first-of-its-kind-survey-on-facultys-response-to-student-mental-health-provides-key-takeaways-for-colleges-in-addressing-campus-mental-health-crisis>