

Defining, Understanding, and Addressing Community College Student Mental Health Challenges: Insights from the UTD-RAND-AIR Mental Health Studies

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Agenda

- Update on Texas Schools Project COVID-19 Research Agenda
- Overview of Studies Examining How Community Colleges Support Student Mental Health
 - RAND-American Institutes for Research-University of Texas at Dallas U.S. Study
 - University of Texas at Dallas-RAND Texas Study
- Large Group Discussion: How should we define / conceptualize mental illness?
- Small Group Discussions: How and Where Should Community Colleges Intervene to Support Student Mental Health?

What is the Texas Schools Project? Update on COVID-19 Research

The Texas Schools Project

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Texas Schools Project supports and conducts high-quality academic research to improve academic achievement and teacher effectiveness, increase transitions to and success in postsecondary education, and improve labor market outcomes of students in Texas and the nation.

TSP is Partnering with the Texas Success Center on a Research Agenda to Inform Pandemic Recovery Efforts of Texas Community Colleges

Pandemic Recovery Study (\$400K from the US Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education)

Mixed-methods study offers timely information on how Texas colleges can best support the students most affected by the pandemic.

Mental Health Study (\$150K from the Trellis Foundation)

Qualitative study identifying strategies that Texas colleges are taking to support the mental health of their students.

Part-Time Students Study (\$300K from the Greater Texas Foundation)

Mixed-methods study designed to better understand part-time enrollment behavior and factors that promote or hinder success of part-time students.

Progress on Pandemic Recovery Research Agenda

Pandemic Recovery Study (\$400K from the US Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education)

We have analyzed administrative data and are preparing a practitioner-focused interim report for release in Summer 2023.

We will conduct administrator interviews in Fall 2023 and produce a final report with the qualitative findings and updated quantitative findings in Fall 2024.

Part-Time Students Study (\$300K from the Greater Texas Foundation)

We have conducted administrator interviews and are finalizing the quantitative analysis in preparation for an interim briefing in Summer or Fall 2023.

We will conduct student focus groups and produce a final report in Fall 2024.

Mental Health Study (\$150K from the Trellis Foundation)

Report on national study is available on the RAND website.

We have conducted administrator interviews and are drafting a report based on experiences of Texas colleges.

UTD-RAND-AIR Community College Mental Health Studies

Dr. Holly Kosiewicz

U.S. and Texas Based Studies

- **Three goals guide these two studies:**
 - Understand how community colleges are approaching the issue of supporting student mental health
 - Identify the interventions, initiatives, and strategies that community colleges are implementing to support student mental health, particularly the mental health of students facing disproportionate life adversity
 - Identify the challenges that community college encounter in addressing student mental health

U.S. and Texas Based Studies

U.S. Study

- **RAND/AIR/UTD partnership**
- **Funded: IES + Trellis Foundation**
- **Sample:** 8 community colleges participating in Active Minds and JED Foundation Initiatives
 - Best case scenario
- **Data:** Survey and Interview Data Provided by College Administrators and Mental Health Counselors
- Report will be released at the beginning of April

Texas Study

- **UTD / RAND partnership**
- **Funded: Trellis Foundation**
- **Sample:** A representative sample of 10 community colleges from across the State of Texas
 - Baseline scenario
- **Data:** Survey and Interview Data Provided by College Administrators and Mental Health Counselors
- Report will be released end of 2023

One Key Takeaway

- Vast majority of community colleges from the U.S. and Texas based study have not developed a formalized plan to support student mental health
 - A formalized plan helps to:
 - Identify where to invest resources and prioritize efforts
 - Align faculty, staff, and students around the goal of supporting mental health
 - Identify where data need to be collected to ensure that goal of supporting student mental health is being met

Conceptualizing Mental Health

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Large Group Discussion: Defining / Conceptualizing Mental Health

Question 1: What comes to mind when you hear the term “mental health”?

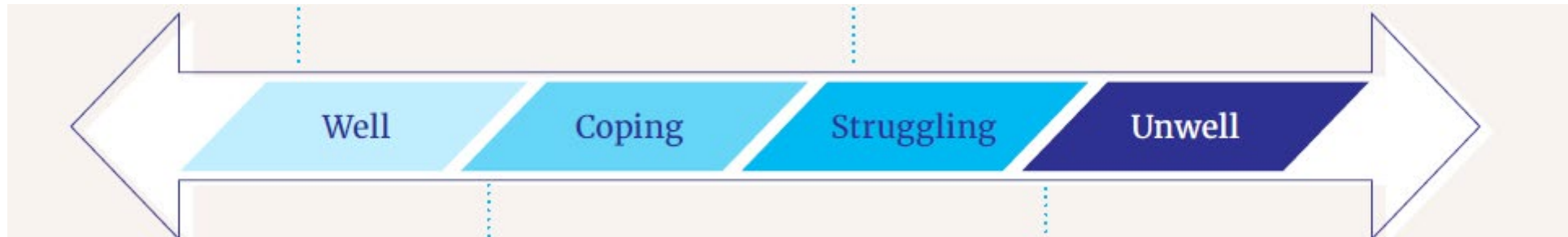
- Do you believe that individuals are either mentally well or mentally ill? Or do you believe that the distinction between mental wellness and mental illness is blurry?

Question 2: Has your college had conversations about what mental health or mental wellness means and how mental health should be supported?

- What do these conversations look like? Who is involved in those conversations?

Mental Health Exists on a Continuum, is Fluid, and Changes over the Life Cycle

- Research shows that ALL individuals experience varying degrees of mental health over the course of their life

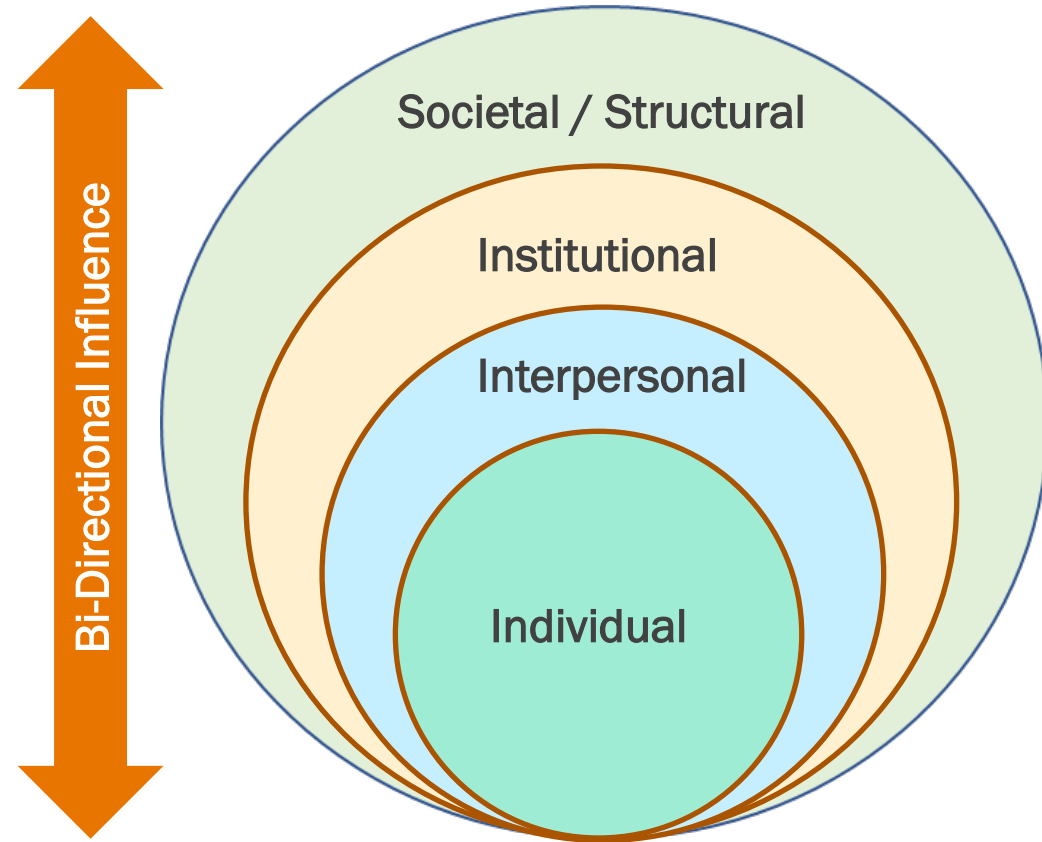


- **Mental health is impacted by various factors:**
 - **Individual factors:** Periods of cognitive or developmental change (e.g. transition into adulthood); quality of physical health (e.g. loss of mobility, chronic disease); genetic factors
 - **Familial and community factors:** Quality of relationships and social networks, physical security
 - **Structural factors:** Social, economic, & environmental conditions (e.g. poverty, economic security)
 - **Temporal factors:** Changing situations and stressors (e.g. COVID-19)

Intervening to Support Mental Health

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Where Community Colleges Can Intervene



Individual Level: To help students develop and learn abilities and habits to deal with their emotions, cope with daily or unanticipated stressors, and engage in healthy living

Interpersonal Level: To help students engage in healthy and productive relationships with faculty, staff, and peers

Institution Level: To improve campus's culture, policies, social norms, and social and built environments

Societal / Structural Level: To advocate for changing broader socio-economic, political, environmental conditions surrounding the institution

Examples of Interventions at Different Spheres of Influence (Abelson, 2022)

- **Individual Level:** (a) mental health counseling services, (b) psycho-educational programming, (c) skills training, (d) coaching, (e) identity support
- **Interpersonal Level:** (a) peer-lead support programs, (b) student affinity groups, (c) mentoring programs, (d) events / spaces to convene students
- **Institutional Level:** (a) syllabi requirements, (b) increases in mental health counseling staff, (c) provision of basic needs, (d) faculty skills training, (e) universal mental health screenings
- **Societal / Structural Level:** (a) lobby efforts to increase access long-term mental health care and primary health care, increase access to financial aid, etc.

Small Group Activity: Where to Intervene

- **Question 1:** In which spheres of influence is your institution intervening to support student mental health?
 - Can you name and describe these interventions?
- **Question 2:** In which spheres is your institution not intervening to support student mental health?
 - What kinds of interventions could your institutions develop or implement given its current infrastructure and level of resources?

Collecting Data to Support Student Mental Health

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Goals of Student Mental Health Data

- Collecting student mental health data is critical for identifying best practices for students with a range of mental health needs
- Data collection efforts should have two goals:
 - **Goal 1:** Data should be timely, and capture information on the mental health needs of students across the mental health continuum
 - **Goal 2:** Data should allow community colleges to document and evaluate interventions implemented at various spheres of

Questions for Leadership and IR

- **Question 1: What kinds of mental health data does your college collect?**
- What sorts of information do these tell you about student mental health?
- Are these data specific for certain types of students (e.g. all students, students referred to the counseling center)? Are these data intervention specific?
- Do these data document the interventions or initiatives used to support student mental health?
- **Question 2: Where are there opportunities to collect additional mental health in existing data collection efforts?**
- Possibilities: campus climate and orientation surveys, Early Alert platforms, counseling center intake, counselor progress reports

Important Data Collection Resources

- **Counseling Center Assessment of Psychological Symptoms (CCAPS) Screen**
 - A validated mental health screening instrument for general student body assessing most common psychological problems experienced by college students.
 - <https://ccmh.psu.edu/ccaps-34-62>
- **Heathy Minds Study**
 - An online student survey examining mental health, service utilization, and related issues among undergraduate and graduate students.
 - <https://healthymindsnetwork.org/hms/>
- **ACHA-National College Health Assessment**
 - A Nationally recognized research survey that assesses students' mental health issues along with other health habits, behaviors, and perceptions
 - <https://www.acha.org/ACHA/Resources/Topics/MentalHealth.aspx>

Thank you!

Have questions? Thoughts? Email us!

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