Promoting Student Wellness

Understanding Factors that Prevent Faculty Responding to Distress

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Student Mental Health Concerns

- Student mental health concerns are on the rise
- A minority of students experiencing mental health problems seek mental health services
- Faculty and staff are on the front lines in terms of contact with students
- Students often exhibit visible signs of distress when they are in the midst of a mental health crisis
- But they don’t always respond to student distress when they see them
Faculty Mental Health Concerns

• Similarly, faculty rarely avail themselves of the resources to address mental health concerns

• Faculty report high levels of stress

• If we want to address the student culture of distress, we also need to understand and address the culture of responding to distress among faculty and staff
Mental Health Concerns

• Conducted a survey to assess the common barriers to faculty responding to signs of distress in students and faculty

• Email sent to all department chairs in December

• $N = 178$ faculty responded to survey

• Faculty were asked to rate to what extent they perceived certain factors to be a barrier to them responding to a student or their own distress
Campus Mental Health Concerns

- Faculty asked to rate to what extent they perceived certain factors to be a barrier to them responding to distress exhibited by a student or within themselves

5 point Likert Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All a Barrier</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>A Major Barrier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Campus Mental Health Concerns

• Statements were grouped into different categories depending on the type of barrier:

Barriers to Responding to Student Distress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Violation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I was hired to teach/do research and engagement in my student’s mental health and personal lives is not a part of that.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Campus Mental Health Concerns

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Barriers to Responding to Student Distress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I do not know what I should say if I were to approach one of my students about what I perceived to be a mental health concern</em>**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Campus Mental Health Concerns

- Statements were grouped into different categories depending on the type of barrier

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to Responding to Student Distress</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability Re: Own Inadequacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I am worried about being judged if I don't handle this situation in the right way.
Campus Mental Health Concerns

- Statements were grouped into different categories depending on the type of barrier

**Barriers to Responding to Student Distress**

**Vulnerability Re: UCI Culture**

*I don’t want to give them the wrong message that UCI is a safe space for students to show they are struggling.*
Campus Mental Health Concerns

• Statements were grouped into different categories depending on the type of barrier

Barriers to Responding to Student Distress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unintended Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not want the student to be offended.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

- Inadequacy
- Culture
- Barrier Importance
- Role
- Competence
- Consequences
- Vulnerability - Inadequacy
- Vulnerability --
Results

**Faculty avoid because of concerns about:
1) Competence
2) Unintended consequences
3) Being judged for not responding well to student distress

** Faculty less likely to be prevented from responding distress based on
1) Role-related or
2) Culture-related concerns
Recommendations

How to address this?

Need to alleviate faculty anxiety about helping through:

1) Education regarding tangible ways to help

2) Explicit messaging regarding non-judgmental stance of administration:

   Faculty will not be judged for attempts to help that don’t land well
   Just lending an ear is an intervention for a student
   Any attempt to help is better than no attempt
Responding to Faculty Mental Health Concerns

• Statements were grouped into different categories depending on the type of barrier

### Barriers to Responding to Own Distress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don’t think that the resources at UCI will be useful in improving my mental health.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Responding to Faculty Mental Health Concerns

- Statements were grouped into different categories depending on the type of barrier

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talking about problems only makes them bigger.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Responding to Faculty Mental Health Concerns

• Statements were grouped into different categories depending on the type of barrier

**Barriers to Responding to Own Distress**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vulnerability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I am worried about being judged if others discover I’m struggling.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier Importance</th>
<th>Coping</th>
<th>Vulnerability</th>
<th>Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

• Faculty believe that addressing their mental health needs by seeking help is the right thing to do, but they are prevented from doing so by vulnerability and efficacy-related barriers.
Recommendations

How to address this?

1) Address Efficacy Barrier by Providing more information regarding resources on campus for faculty mental health needs

2) Address Vulnerability Barrier through Top-Down Initiatives from Chief Wellness Officer and Dept Chairs Discussing Own Struggles, Self-Compassion, and Stress Reduction
Overall Results

• Barriers to responding to students greater than barriers responding to own distress, \( t(161) = -8.44, p < .001 \).

• Strong positive correlation between perception of barriers to responding to student and barriers to responding to faculty distress, \( r = .54, p < .001 \).

• Suggests a two-pronged approach addressing both student and faculty barriers is important.
Conclusions

• Responding to student distress:
  -- Faculty perceived incompetence, fears of judgment key

• Responding to own distress:
  -- Faculty perceived lack of resources, fears of judgment key

• Strong positive correlation between the two means a two-pronged approach is essential