



A Matter of Mental Health

STORY: DEBBIE BLACK | PHOTO: YOSEF KALINKO

The college experience is about coming home to yourself, learning what gives you purpose and joy in your life, and in which direction you will begin your professional journey. Seattle U is committed to helping students discern their future path and provides support and guidance to students during times of difficulty and distress. It's part of the university's practice of *Cura Personalis*, care for the whole person, mind, body and spirit, a fundamental Jesuit value. Seattle U's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) team is essential to this practice.

A recent nationwide survey conducted by the American College Health Association found that three out of five students experienced overwhelming anxiety and two out of five students were too depressed to function. Seattle University students are not exempt from these challenges. In fact, 41 percent of Seattle U students have experienced at

least one mental health problem. In large part to a supportive environment, our students seek out care from CAPS at a rate that has increased exponentially over the past decade.

Primary Issues of Concern

According to CAPS Director Kim Caluza, Psy.D, Seattle U students' most common mental health concerns have demonstrated a clear growth trend over the last four years, and align with those of college students nationwide. They are: anxiety, depression and relationship matters. Students often experience anxiety in relation to test-taking or social situations. Mild depression is sometimes related to seasonal affective disorder, particularly if a student is from a sunnier climate. Students' relationship concerns don't necessarily pertain to a romantic partner. The problem could be with a parent, sibling, roommate or friend. In some cases it's the

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first time a student has experienced either the loss of a family member, or a family member's battle with a life-threatening disease.

"Generally speaking, it's also around age 18 or 19 that a person may have a first experience with psychosis," Caluza says.

CAPS is a good place for students to land if they're experiencing a mild, moderate or first time symptom presentation. Its professional team of licensed clinicians can help students access the resources they need, get a good treatment plan in place, and provide time-limited individual therapy or group therapy sessions. However, student demand for acute or crisis-oriented services has also risen. Though CAPS does offer Urgent Care for students having an acute personal crisis who are unable to wait for a regular appointment, it is not resourced to serve students needing ongoing or specialized treatment.

"If a student needs ongoing counseling or a higher level of care," Caluza says, "we try to connect them with a mental health provider off-campus."

Suicide Prevention

Outpatient management of high suicide risk more than doubled at CAPS between 2017-2018. To address this rising crisis, Seattle U has joined the Washington State Campus Cohort Suicide Prevention Program, a prevention initiative for universities. As part of the cohort program, SU is funded to participate in JED Campus, a program promoting mental wellness for college students, including access to mental health services, substance abuse treatment and suicide prevention. Caluza leads the JED initiative at SU, and has pulled-in partners to contribute to a campus-wide self-assessment of Seattle U's preventative programs, systems and challenges. A site visit and feedback from a JED Campus advisor followed, including recommended action items for a suicide prevention strategic plan.

"Based on our JED Campus advisor's recommendations, we've been making incremental systemic changes across campus to decrease the likelihood of student death by suicide," she says.

Meeting Student Needs

CAPS has taken several steps to expedite student access to mental health services. One of these is to contract with the provider of an online interactive self-help tool called Pacifica. Students can download the Pacifica app onto their phones and access its premium services free of charge. These include on-demand, evidence-based, cognitive behavioral therapy and mindfulness approaches to address symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression. The Pacifica app also offers mood tracking, thought journaling, goal setting, guided meditation, and help finding an off-campus therapist.

Private donor support to the Campaign for Seattle University will allow CAPS to hire a fulltime permanent Case Manager. Interviews are currently underway. The Case Manager will be specifically tasked with connecting students to ongoing specialized care when needed.

While individual counseling sessions with CAPS providers are limited, group therapy sessions are not. Pragmatically speaking, group therapy allows one mental health provider to work with up to eight students at one time. Further, groups are a great way for students to build relationships and community, which is of particular benefit to the many students who seek support in countering loneliness. Group sessions are offered each quarter and focus on specific topics, such as Finding Calm, Not Alone, Mindfulness and Self-Compassion.

The Campaign for Seattle University

While CAPS continues its work to best serve the increased volume of students seeking on-campus mental healthcare, growing the number of mental healthcare professionals on staff is critical. Through the Campaign for Seattle University, CAPS hopes to fully fund a \$2 million Endowment for Mental Health and Wellness, which will:

- Grow the number of direct service providers, including additional licensed clinicians.

- Fund campus-wide training on how to recognize and proactively support students needing help.
- Increase the number of broad-based support groups and workshops providing coping skills and tools.

To-date, \$1.45 million has been contributed to the Mental Health and Wellness Endowment.

For some students, access to on-campus therapeutic support can be life altering; for others, it can provide tools for lifelong use in managing the stresses of adulthood.

If you would like more information on CAPS or to make a gift to the Mental Health and Wellness Endowment, contact Saoirse Jones, 206.296.6463.

