Report and Recommendations
Mental Health Task Force
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In May 2013, Georgia Tech President G. P. "Bud" Peterson formed the Mental Health Task Force in response to concerns raised by undergraduate and graduate student leaders regarding stressors faced by Georgia Tech students and resulting mental health concerns. He appointed Ms. Lynn Durham, his chief of staff, to ensure a broad review of all campus units and their impact on the mental health concerns raised by our students. The task force was comprised of four students – two undergraduate and two graduate– and faculty and staff from both the academic and operational units of campus.

During the summer, the task force met as two separate groups to begin assessment of current programs and recommendations for future action. Dean of Students John Stein led the group focused on student life issues and Counseling Center Director Ruperto Perez led the group focused on academic affairs issues. The groups came together in the early fall to discuss and refine the recommendations. The recommendations included in this report have the full support of all task force members.

An underlying theme through all the task force discussions was the challenging and competitive academic environment at Georgia Tech. Most students have been considered "overachievers" who have been successful throughout their academic careers prior to entering Georgia Tech. Alumni, students and faculty alike are understandably proud of the academic rigor at Georgia Tech and the exceptional graduates that have been produced. However, the high expectations placed on students by themselves, their professors and sometimes their families have led to a cultural acceptance of a high-stress, high-productivity environment. In fact, a 2011 National College Health Assessment revealed that 89.9% of Georgia Tech students reported they were "very stressed" while the national rate was 52.9%.

The Mental Health Task Force attempted to take a holistic view of the areas of a student's life that can cause extreme stress – academics including interactions with faculty, peer pressure specifically related to selection of majors, finances, relationships, and the campus culture that includes a "love to hate" mentality in regard to athletics and other facets of campus life. We encourage campus leaders and faculty to take further steps to change aspects of the campus culture to be more positive and motivational to our students.

Current mental health offerings on campus

Georgia Tech has many resources currently available to students who are experiencing severe stress and/or symptoms of mental health issues. They include:

- Georgia Tech Counseling Center (GTCC) providing 24-hour crisis coverage, significant campus outreach and education, crisis evaluations, psycho-educational seminars on a variety of topics, some availability for individual therapy (16 sessions) at no cost to students and unlimited group therapy at no cost to students.

- Psychiatry Clinic at Stamps Health Services with 2.75 FTE of psychiatrists (all board certified) providing complete psychiatric evaluations, ongoing individual therapy and medication management. The first two hours of treatment each year are free of charge; subsequent treatment is subsidized to cost $25 per half hour of treatment.

- Interdisciplinary Treatment Teams (composed of GTCC, Psychiatry, Health Promotion, Internal Medicine Doctors, and Dieticians) for eating disorders and substance abuse.

- ADAPTS and other Office of the Dean of Students services (including student of concern referral option for faculty, staff and students; 24-hour emergency response through the Dean-on-Call service; and consultation services to faculty and staff regarding students of concern).

Projects/programs currently being proposed/considered for implementation

In response to increased awareness of the mental health challenges facing students, many campus organizations have proposed or are implementing programs to meet student needs. Some examples are:

- Mental Health Web Portal (developing template and content).

- Peer counseling program with Counseling Center (exploratory/organizational).

- Live streaming of selected Stress Management Workshops (Counseling Center) to allow greater access to students.

- Initial implementation of recovery program with students in recovery (Counseling Center).

- Establishment of a Presidential committee to oversee campus accessibility.

- Enhanced/expanded new student orientation for international students.

- Proposed Peer Mentoring program for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders to aid in retention.

- Collaborative pilot program between the Counseling Center and Campus Recreation Center ("Healthy Lifestyles for the Mind and Body Program") where the Counseling

Center refers students who may benefit from healthy lifestyle programming/physical activity at the CRC.

- Registration Task Force reviewing the withdrawal date to determine what is standard, whether change is advisable, and what the implications of a change would be.

- Georgia Tech, It's Friday (GTIF), a Student Center initiative focused on building positive school spirit and encouraging students, faculty, and staff to wear white and gold on Fridays.

Task Force Recommendations

The Mental Health Task Force members acknowledge the concerns expressed by students and make the following recommendations to President Peterson and his senior leadership team for consideration.

1. Design and implement a periodic comprehensive survey of undergraduate students, graduate students and post-docs that asks questions pertaining to mental health, quality of life, and faculty engagement and/or mentoring.

2. Establish a Center for Student Wellness (similar to the Athletic Association's Total Person Program) that would be available to all students. The Center could be housed in the Campus Recreation Center or as a separate center, and would serve as a base for physical and mental health promotion and programming. It could also encompass complementary programs including a center for alcohol and drug recovery and research.

3. Develop initiatives to centralize information about various services for students and identify a point agency (or person or group) that will be responsible for disseminating and updating this information. This should include:

    a. the development and maintenance of a portal that would combine this information with mental health resources;
    b. the development of videos and panel discussions and other health promotion activities aimed at identifying and dealing with stress;
    c. the development and training of a network of students, faculty and staff (RAs, faculty advisors, etc.) to help students access GT services and be a "first line" for identifying students in crisis ("Safety Nests" proposal, Appendix A), as well as facilitating student access to the entire range of support services on campus; and
    d. the development of peer mentoring programs to better provide support to students with certain conditions such as Autism or Bipolar disorder to aid in retention.

4. Establish a working group of student leaders and staff who develop programs and events (e.g., Alumni Association, Athletic Association, Institute Communications, Residence Life) that highlight school spirit and a sense of belonging to Georgia Tech. The purpose would be to promote positive foundations for school spirit in contrast to the "love to hate" mentality prevalent on campus. Events should be inclusive for all students – undergraduate, graduate, and non-traditional – and give them opportunities to meet outside their cohorts/schools.

5. Create initiatives to promote awareness of the value and contributions of all academic majors and the potential value to students of a change of major.

6. Develop the following education programs:
    a. GT 1000 for transfer students.
    b. GT 6000 class/seminar for graduate students.
    c. Faculty development/mentoring to promote best practices in communicating with students in ways that facilitate healthy student-faculty relationships. This would include classroom protocols and informing students of their academic progress.
    d. A series of programs for graduate students on promoting a balanced lifestyle.

7. Review and recommend faculty awards to highlight faculty for their positive student interaction or mentoring.

8. Support the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid in conducting an inquiry into tools that could be used to help current and prospective students and families better understand aggregate debt levels in the context of Return on Investment (ROI).

9. Support the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid in developing a method to communicate a "warning" message to those HOPE/Zell Miller recipients who are below the required GPA at the end of each semester. Also, fund the creation of a web-based GPA calculator to be included on BuzzPort allowing students to quickly determine the impact of potential future grades on retaining/regaining the HOPE/Zell Miller scholarship.

10. Encourage the timely distribution of Graduate Teaching/Research Assistantship information to graduate students to allow them to explore other options if their department is not able to provide financial support for the upcoming academic year. Also, designate a point of contact in each school/department so graduate students know whom to contact with questions/concerns regarding financial questions.

11. Review Counseling Center allocations to ensure there are sufficient resources to meet staffing and space recommendations based on most recent International Association of Counseling Services accreditation site visit.

Conclusion

Mental health and overall quality of life for students at Georgia Tech encompasses a broad array of factors related to wellness, including but not limited to curricular and co-curricular influences as well as social, interpersonal, and physical health. Georgia Tech has many resources in place to assist our students in all these areas, but more can be done to help them achieve the right balance so they can excel and succeed with confidence and wellness.

"SAFETY NESTS"

"Safety Nests" at Georgia Tech – A Campus Wide Safety Initiative
May 2012

Executive Summary

Due to recent events at colleges around the country and here at Georgia Tech, there is increased interest in campus wide initiatives that could increase the safety of the entire Institute community. At the same time, Georgia Tech has recently completed a multidisciplinary Mental Health Task Force Report that bolsters the visibility of mental health issues on campus. A number of the recommendations of this report specifically call for the creation of collaborative networks among mental health providers and other key administrative staff.

In this context, the Stamps Health Services Psychiatry Department has reviewed a number of campus initiatives at peer institutions aimed at increasing awareness and

treatment of specific mental health issues. It is clear that students in crisis are first identified by their friends, roommates and family members. Programs that reach out to a concerned "community" have the best chance of reaching students most in need, who are often hesitant to reach out for help for themselves. However, in our assessment, programs at other colleges and universities have often suffered from too narrow a scope making them less integrated into the milieu of student life. We believe that the most successful program would have a high campus visibility, and would be integrated into student life through residence halls, Greek life, athletics and academics.

Our proposed program will aim to create a campus wide group of Safety Nest providers (made up of both students and faculty) with a broad scope, rather than target a specific concern (e.g., suicide, violence prevention, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered [LGBT] issues). These providers will function as student resource ombudsmen and act as screeners for all potential problems that a student might encounter. They will provide safe and friendly non-judgmental support and facilitate referrals using an extensive list of campus resources. It is our hope that instead of competing with other campus initiatives for student attention, our Safety Nest providers, made up of resident advisors, Greek Life leaders, faculty advisors, mentors and others, will be seen as helpful and supportive guides to all the campus resources that a student might need. Though these providers will be trained to screen for a number of mental health and safety concerns, the focus of their training will be on helping them identify which services are appropriate for a specific student and facilitate students' access to these resources.

We see the initial development of this project to have two parts, each requiring roughly six months of work. First, we would convene multidisciplinary teams to develop Safety Nest campus resource guides and plan the training program. Second, we will pilot the training with a group of roughly 100 resident advisors in the spring. Pre- and post-training surveys will evaluate our success at training screening techniques and resource facilitation.

Project Description

"Safety Nests" at Georgia Tech – A Campus Wide Safety Initiative

When looking at campus wide initiatives addressing mental health, there have been a number of successful "gatekeeper" initiatives. These programs typically train a large number of individuals to recognize signs of particular issues affecting college students. Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) "Question, Persuade, Refer" program trained volunteers to recognize suicide warning signs and behaviors. Emory University's program, "Emory Cares 4 U," also targets suicide screening using a variety of interventions. The University of California at Berkeley developed a program titled "Look for the Signs" to train administrators, faculty, and counselors to identify signs of mental illness.

Similarly, at hundreds of colleges across the country, "Safe Space" programs train faculty and students to raise awareness of LGBT issues that might affect students and

to provide resources to students that seek help.

Our Safety Nest initiative would take something from each of these programs. We would recruit Safety Nest providers throughout the Georgia Tech campus, including students, faculty and staff. These providers will be trained to provide non-judgmental support to students and to screen for a variety of mental health and wellness issues (including crisis management, suicide, threat assessment, substance abuse, eating disorders, sexual violence, and discrimination). Safety Nest providers will also be trained in the use of a Georgia Tech Resource Manual, an online resource that will contain descriptions of all the possible student resources on campus, organized with flow charts for handling specific referral issues.

Student Benefits

Students would access these Safety Nests by simply looking for a designated sign or symbol in places such as their residence hall, academic building, advisor's office or the Campus Recreation Center. A student could stop in at any Safety Nest site and ask for assistance. At this point, they would be welcomed and asked to describe their concern in some detail. After the Safety Nest provider asks a few clarifying questions, he or she would sit down together with the student to determine which possible on-campus resources would best suit the student's particular needs. The provider might help with facilitating access to these services if needed. In this way, a single "Safety Nest" provider might guide a student with concerns about their roommate's depression and self-cutting behavior to the Counseling Center, the Office of the Dean of Students, Housing support staff and student-run support services for students with depression. A student who had been physically assaulted by her significant other might be referred to Stamps Health Services, the Women's Resource Center, the Georgia Tech Police Department and the Counseling Center.

Not only would students benefit from facilitated access to a number of campus services, but they would not be required to keep track of the host of programs and resources available on campus.

Additionally, existing campus service providers would not see this program as competing with theirs for limited student attention but would realize that the Safety Nest program would act to increase appropriate referrals of students to all campus programs.

Key Partnerships

Georgia Tech has already been forming partnerships as part of the recent Mental Health Task Force. In a number of specific recommendations, this Task Force has called for significant collaboration among Stamps Health Services, the Office of the Dean of Students, Housing, the Counseling Center, the Georgia Tech Police Department, Legal Affairs, and others. Our proposal would help develop these strategic partnerships.

We envision the first six-month phase of this project requiring the formation of two multidisciplinary teams. The first of these teams would begin the task of assembling and organizing the online manual of all existing campus resources for students. In addition to describing each resource and the scope of student issues it addresses, the manual will give contact information for routine and urgent (if appropriate) referrals for each resource. These resources will need to be organized with flow charts aimed at particular constellations of student issues. Any manual that is developed should be created as a web-based resource.

The other team will need to design a training session for Safety Nest providers. These providers will be trained to recognize signs of various mental health concerns, but the focus of this training will be to give instruction in interviewing and screening techniques and a broad overview of the kinds of problems providers may encounter. This training will also instruct the providers in the use of the resource manual and provide skills development to facilitate referrals for students. Much of this training could be done by videotaped online modules. In addition, we anticipate a training session with breakout groups for demonstration and practice of interviewing techniques.