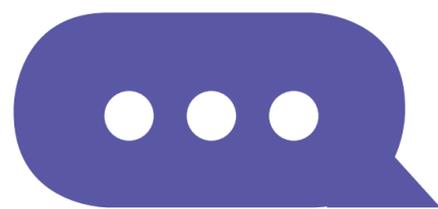


## Keeping the Conversation Going



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There's something about waiting for doctor's appointments or health check-ups that always make me nervous. Maybe it has something to do with all the paperwork, or maybe it's the silence that permeates the room as I sit waiting to get called back. It could be a by-product of getting sick a lot as a kid, that feeling of dread as I wait for the inevitable. That familiar nervous feeling came flooding back to me Friday as I sat, feeling too small for my chair, while waiting for my very first appointment at University Counseling Services.

I'd scheduled a mental health screening. On paper, I was feeling stressed out and wanted to try to find some ways to alleviate those feelings. Beneath the surface, I was curious — was my stress a valid enough reason to schedule an appointment like this? Was I even experiencing too much stress to begin with?

The short answer is I wasn't as stressed as I thought I was, but I'm glad I followed through. One of the forms I'd filled out resulted in a percentile score for various categories of mental well-being, and in some categories I had the best scores UCS assistant director Joe Hamilton said he had ever seen. I was feeling good even before finding this out — I was able to talk through many of the potential stressors for me from the past few years and onward. I walked out of UCS feeling significantly better than I did before my appointment.

As a whole, I really think it's important for students to keep a careful watch of their mental health, even if only to alleviate the stress of getting ready to graduate or starting a new chapter at Truman State University. I was worried my concerns wouldn't be as worthy of the time and care to address, but I think I was wrong. There are a lot of resources for us here at Truman — regardless of what's going on in our lives — and there are ways that each of us can embrace them.

### University Counseling Services

UCS offers more than just free mental health screenings. Hamilton said UCS also facilitates individual student counseling and group relationship counseling. He said they also do outreach to campus groups — this service provides advice for stress management, similar to what brought me to UCS and general mental health. Hamilton said UCS also offers consultations and a crisis line in serious situations.

Granted, it doesn't seem like students aren't aware of these services, as UCS has seen a recent uptick in visits, Hamilton said.

"In August, we did have a record month," Hamilton said. "We had more students come in for services in August than in any month in the history of counseling services being on Truman's campus."

Hamilton said there's a sort of generational gap that contributes to how students today are exposed to ways to care for their mental health. He said the students of today have grown up seeing commercials for various medications that help with common mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, and he said this contributes to how they view mental health.

"I think it helps students see it as a health issue and that it's something that's treatable, like any health issue," Hamilton said. "I definitely think that — while there is still maybe some students who are uncomfortable talking about mental health issues or seeking counseling or medication — overall just with the current generation of college students, they're much more open to talking about mental health issues and supporting one another."

Hamilton said despite this trend, there still seems to be a stigma among some people surrounding mental health. He said UCS sometimes sees students whose families didn't support them seeking counseling, though they might have been struggling with symptoms of depression or anxiety.

Hamilton said UCS would prefer to see people address issues of mental health sooner rather than later, but he said it should be something a student has been struggling with for a longer period.

"Everyone has bad days or has a stressful day now and then, so if you have those kinds of experiences and you seem to be managing them okay, then you don't necessarily need to come to counseling," Hamilton said. "But if it's something that's ongoing, if it disrupts your daily functioning, if you're having trouble getting out of bed or keeping up with your daily hygiene, not going to class because of how you're feeling, not being able to keep up with your homework, those kinds of things. If it's affecting your relationships with other people, those would be reasons to seek support."

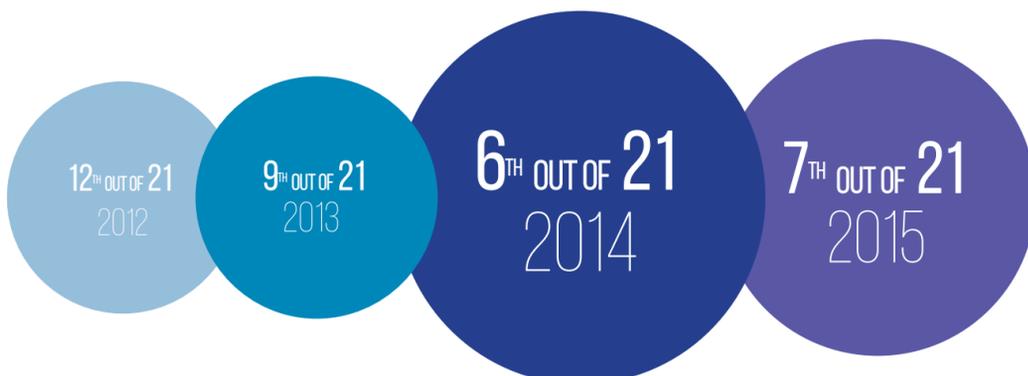
Hamilton also provided some statewide rankings through the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors, which places Truman's depression rate around the top half of the rankings from 2012-2015.

### Student Affairs

Lou Ann Gilchrist, vice president for Student Affairs, said statistics indicate the possibility 20-25 percent of

## TRUMAN STATE UNIVERSITY

STATE DEPARTMENT DEPRESSION RANKING DURING THE PAST FOUR YEARS



THE SURVEY ASSESSES 21 SCHOOLS, INCLUDING THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI, MARYVILLE UNIVERSITY, SOUTHEAST MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY, COLUMBIA COLLEGE AND DRURY UNIVERSITY, AMONG OTHERS.

Source: Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors

### Greek Life

Damon Pee, Greek Life Program Advisor for Organizational Engagement and Leadership, said there was a strong call from students and the administration following the deaths of students Alex Mullins and Jake Hughes asking for some response regarding mental health awareness. Pee said Greek Life responded by forming a mental health committee made up of students involved with Greek Life. During September, the committee brainstormed both about different mental health issues affecting either men or women and mental health issues that can affect everyone.

"We're trying to frame [this] conversation that, when you talk about physical health, people often think of like bodybuilders and of people being really strong or fit and active," Pee said. "I think one of the philosophical foundations of what we're trying to do is frame that mental health conversation as what are the positive things that we can focus on? What are the strategies that we can utilize to prevent ourselves from being in a situation where we might become depressed, or whatever that mental health issue is?"

Pee said Greek Life will host Strike Out the Stigma Oct. 3, which will kick off the programming the mental health committee has been brainstorming. Then, Pee said the goal is to continue to host events either weekly or biweekly for the rest of the semester. After that, he said Greek Life will look into resources it can use to sustain the programs. He said this would include securing grant money and bringing in additional resources to possibly train people on peer counseling and positive psychology.

Pee said mental health is a prevalent topic that impacts the Truman community every day. Despite this, Pee said student engagement with topics like these work differently today because of social media.

"If having an open house in a physical place isn't necessarily a way that is impactful for our students, then we need to change our programming," Pee said. "We need to change how we're doing things, and I think our students have voiced that there's different opportunities and different ways we can do that. It's really taking a look at what we're doing and planning to meet [students] in those arenas."

Pee said Greek Life community members aren't the only students affected by the loss of student members of Greek Life during the past few years. Pee said it's obvious people want to become active participants in the conversation about mental health, but it's up to students who aren't as involved to step up.

"You can only do so much from behind your screen," Pee said. "It's great that there's people promoting, sharing those stories through their respective social media pipelines. But when there are actual physical programs going on — come support. I think spending some time within the community interacting with one another is going to be far more beneficial than interacting in a virtual space."

our student population, at any given time, will experience symptoms that lead to a mental illness diagnosis. Gilchrist said there's evidence mental illness has three causes that all work together — a genetic predisposition for some types of mental illness, environmental stressors and the personality of an individual.

Gilchrist said in the event students are suffering with a mental illness, the University has some "safety nets" in place to help students. She said there is a new academic leave policy, which allows students to take up to a year off of school for personal or professional reasons, all while keeping Truman scholarships for that time.

"If you need to go home to get treatment for any kind of a medical condition, including one that would qualify for a mental health issue, you can do that, and we just make it a little easier for you to come back," Gilchrist said.

Gilchrist said the University also provides annual programming through UCS, giving first-year students bystander training.

Gilchrist said managing mental health is different for everyone. She said especially when dealing with grief, people react in different ways — they might want some space to be emotional and isolate themselves, while others might want to go to class and get their minds off things.

"That's why one size just doesn't fit all," Gilchrist said. "And again, it depends on the relationship. There can be people that had encounters with people that they've lost that don't feel the same loss that another person might feel with very similar encounters. You can't tell one person, 'Well, you really ought to be upset,' and the other person, 'You ought to be less upset.' Grief just doesn't work that way."

### Residence Life

Residence Life director John Gardner said Residence Life staff undertakes a lot of training dealing with identifying what to look for in mental health situations. Gardner said this can result in a broad variety of things Residence Life staff might see, from students just feeling anxious to students feeling suicidal or engaging in non-suicidal self-injurious behavior.

"What our job is a lot of times is being the eyes and ears and kind of identifying where those situations might be occurring, and then trying to get the student connected with the appropriate resource," Gardner said. "We are not mental health professionals, but we are people that help folks get connected with those resources."

Gardner said in crisis situations, it's typical for student Residence Life staff to be informed first, who then communicate with hall directors or community coordinators. These staff members then talk with the student, asking a series of questions about how they're feeling at that time. Gardner said the goal is to assess whether the student is experiencing a mental health crisis and if that is the case, Residence Life will transfer the situation to UCS.

Gardner said UCS can handle most situations, but every case is different. He said in cases where Residence Life is worried about a student's safety, they will instead send that student to the hospital.