

At UMD, anxiety and depression are the two most commonly reported health issues among students. In the 2013 College Student Health Survey Report, 70 out of 955 students at UMD reported that they were diagnosed with anxiety. Forty-nine students reported that they were diagnosed with depression. Seven students reported that they attempted suicide that year.

“This trend of students with mental health conditions being the top category receiving support is happening at UMD just as much as it is nationwide,” said Emily Norenberg, director of disability resources at UMD.

College students at UMD and nationally are struggling with anxiety and depression. Administrators at UMD encourage students to seek help through on-campus support systems, such as Disability Resources, Health Services and campus events. However, some student leaders think that UMD should become more involved with students’ mental health, starting with more support during freshman year.

Chelsea Blaylock is a senior at UMD with a double major in criminology and psychology, and the student president of Active Minds at UMD. Blaylock joined Active Minds and later developed depression.

“It was the summer before going into my junior year of college that I started to experience depression and anxiety. I was working two jobs and taking two classes at UMD that summer, so I was really stressed and frustrated,” Blaylock said. “I didn’t know I was experiencing depression myself. I thought I was the only one.”

Active Minds is a nonprofit organization that focuses on “changing the conversation of mental health” between students across college campuses. The organization gives students a place to go where they can feel comfortable talking about how they’re feeling and can ask for help when they need it.

“In Active Minds, we try to hold events so students know that we’re here to help them,” Blaylock said.

Active Minds holds national events to help fight against mental health stigma, including the Send Silence Packing event that was held at UMD in April of 2014, an exhibition made up of 1,100 donated backpacks that represent the number of college students that are lost to suicide each year.

“I used to think ‘nobody understands,’ but now I know I’m not alone. There are people that get what I’m going through,” said Deanna Draz, another student president of Active Minds.

The top four stressors of college students are related to school work, grades, money and jobs, according to a 2008 survey done by the Associated Press and mtvU. Six out of 10 students reported that they couldn’t finish their homework on time and 53 percent of students reported they didn’t hang out with friends because they were too stressed.

Stressors related to anxiety and depression at UMD range anywhere from conflicts with roommates to failing a class.

“My roommates were actually a huge part of why I kept feeling worse and worse about myself,” Blaylock said. “They would listen to me talk about what I'm feeling, but eventually they stopped wanting to listen. I guess I understand that it's hard to continuously watch your friend fall in a deep, dark hole and not know how to climb out.”

Anxiety is characterized as one of the most prevalent mental health problems that occur on U.S. college campuses, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. Nearly 40 million adults suffer from anxiety, and 75 percent of that population experienced their first anxiety attack by the age of 22.

Anxiety can be described as the feeling of drowning and the feeling of being powerless. Those who experience depression say that it's overwhelming and exhausting. An overarching theme is a constant feeling of being alone and misunderstood.

Blaylock and Draz insist that getting connected with others that struggle with anxiety and depression is vital to the coping process versus the alternatives: alcohol, drugs and self-medicating.

“Exercising is another good way to cope,” Blaylock said. “It really does help.”

“Being healthy in general helps,” Draz added.

Student leaders don't think that UMD takes the full perspective of mental health into consideration when holding events such as Bulldog Welcome Week, and they want UMD to do more to raise awareness about support for mental health during a student's freshman year.

Blaylock and Draz have been attempting to get in contact with directors of the UMD seminars to discuss the benefits of having Active Minds speak during the freshman classes. “It hasn't been working out as well as we expected,” Draz said.

“It's kind of a battle of time,” said Samantha DeVilbiss, a UMD seminar coordinator. “It's like all of these things that we know are really important to help students in their transition into college and to be successful, and only having so much time to do that, which is really unfortunate.”

UMD offers a variety of resources for students to reach out to in a time of need, including Disability Resources and Health Services. Accommodations in Disability Resources include note taking assistance, which allows students to partner with a classmate when taking notes, and during tests students can get extra time and a more comfortable environment.

During the 2013-14 school year, 368 students sought help through Disability Resources.

In Disability Resources, when a student comes in and asks for help, they are typically directed to other resources at UMD that will assist them in maintaining a good academic standing, such as the Learning Commons.

“We take more of a holistic approach at UMD,” Norenberg said.

Students are encouraged to go to the Disability Resources office and ask for help and to stay away from email. To talk with a counselor at Health Services, call 218-726-7913 and make an appointment. Counseling services are provided free of charge to all UMD students.

All these resources and initiatives that UMD offers are attempting to change the conversation about mental health, which Blaylock said is critical and should start when a student first enrolls at UMD.

However, finding these resources around campus isn’t easy. Instead of having a one-stop shop, services are scattered around the UMD campus. Disability Resources is located in the Multicultural Center, and Health Services is located near Lake Superior Hall.

“You have resources in the residence halls, but if you aren’t living in the residence halls you don’t have those resources,” DeVilbiss said.

Colleges around the U.S. are focusing on ways to help students with mental health, but they tend to lack resources and often rely on student groups like Active Minds to lead the way.

Maggie Bertram, the associate director of training and education at Active Minds headquarters in Washington, D.C., said colleges are trying to get a more diverse group of counselors and to expose students to resources because “the overall problem is that students aren’t aware.”