



August 14, 2023

To The Oakland University Senate Steering Committee:

This is the end-of-year report of the Mental Health Ad Hoc Committee, 2022-2023

Chairs: Susan McCarty, Jessie Hurse

Committee members: Kimberly Byrd, Theresa Chahine, Terry Dibble, Melodie Kondratak, Danielle Ligoeki, Jennifer Matthews, Malea Borucki, Shona Collins, Jenna Cornwell, Tyler Gallagher, Charles Guzowski, Cortney Heileman, Karis Horn, Haleigh Lewis, Theresa Hardnett, Carrie Miller, Lizz Parkinson, David Schwartz, Kenneth Stein

Meetings: We met every four weeks, on the following dates: September 14, Oct 12, November 9, December 14, February 8, March 8, April 12

In the fall semester, we formed committees and discussed how to best fulfill our charges: 1) To gather information on all mental health services currently available on campus (how they operate, their availability, cost, capacity, etc.); 2) To assess mental health issues and needs on campus; 3) To gather information on the various OU web pages that have information about mental health support services and to organize that information to be more easily accessible and visible by supervising the creation of one main web page that can be accessed from the main OU home page; and 4) To promote and advocate of the mental health needs of the OU community.

Each committee member joined a subcommittee to address one of these main charges. Some of the big ideas that came out of the meetings in the fall semester are as follows:

SEHS Counseling center graduate students could be better utilized to provide care for students who are in need and in a waiting list care gap.

The waitlist for the Graham Counseling Center is problematically long and students are not getting their mental health needs met in a timely way.

The Graham Counseling Center is *extremely* short staffed. In fall 2022, there was 1 full-time staff member per 3,096 students. **This is the worst ratio by far for a Michigan university**, with FSU being the next lowest at 1:2,166. All other Michigan universities sit at one full-time staff member to <2,000 students. The average student-to-staff ratio of a community college in Michigan is 1 full-time employee for every 1,300 students. The recommended ratio by the International Accreditation of Counseling Services is 1:1,000. While Graham is doing their best with the resources provided to them, it's clear that OU is not meeting the minimum standards for mental health in terms of staffing.

This problem was exacerbated in Winter semester, when a full-time administrator at Graham was laid off without warning.

Within our committee, which includes top mental-health specialists at OU, it was made clear that high-level decisions regarding mental health at OU are being made without the guidance of mental-health professionals on campus, and if OU wants to provide adequate mental-health services, commensurate with the current needs of students, faculty, and staff, there will need to be a new conversation at the administrative level that includes mental-health professionals on campus and dedicated funding to assess and correct mental-health gaps on campus.

Our committee discussed possibilities, such as recommending our campus go through a third-party consultation or assessment with a mental-health focused non-profit, such as with the JED foundation (from their website: “The Jed Foundation (JED) is a nonprofit that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for our nation’s teens and young adults).

We also discussed ways of collating information on our website, including designing a new landing page for mental health that points the user to all the different spaces on the Oakland website where mental health services are offered.

During the winter semester, I was on sabbatical and so largely out of touch with the committee, however I was notified about the firing of the Graham Health staff member, and was in touch with David and Jessie about a letter-writing campaign as well as a presentation to the Senate. I’m not sure of the outcome of these plans, but I feel public awareness is an important part of our committee and I hope we can meet with the Senate in 2023-24 to make our case for the need for increased funding and support for mental health on campus.

Sincerely,

Susan McCarty

Associate Professor
Department of English