

Calling On Faculty to Support Our Mental Health

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Trigger warning: *The following article contains mention of suicide and other topics related to mental health.*

In 2013, we put up nets and we hired a handful of new mental health care providers. In 2017 and early 2018, we again hired a handful of new mental health care providers. Problem solved, right?

Wrong.

We put up the nets and hired new counselors after a string of suicides in 2010. We hired new counselors after students made enough noise about increasing the diversity of the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff. Then, we increased staff again, only, after successive suicides in 2017.

Much of today's buzz around mental health care on campus focuses on hiring more staff to keep up with the growing student demand, which has increased by 65.5% between the 2015-16 and 2016-17 academic years. According to Greg Eells, director of CAPS, this demand is on a steep incline. While it is essential to bolster the current staff with diverse individuals to keep up with rising demand, it is not the end-all-be-all solution to the increasing issues surrounding mental health care on campus.

"Class, your term paper will be due Monday and your prelim Tuesday, don't forget."

"Alright, I have 3 finals within 48 hours but none can be moved since 2 are within 24 hours of each other, which is allowed...Cool."

"I have 4 assignments due tomorrow at 10am but I have had a fever for the past week and I am feeling very anxious but I will just push through."

Sound familiar?

This doesn't have to be the noise ringing through campus and we need faculty cooperation to change it. The solution to fixing negative mental health on campus must start in our classrooms and campus environments. The spaces in which we learn should be realms that are more understanding and forgiving of the pressures that students from all walks of life face. Instead of being retroactive, we, as students, need to be emboldened to push the administration and our professors to proactively address mental health.

"Class, given the recent events going on campus, I have decided to extend the due date of the term paper. I know many of you must be having a hard time. The floor is yours, we can talk about it, or not, but I want you all to know that I understand things must be stressful and I will try to accommodate."

It is time to make *this* sort of noise. It is time to ask for help when you need it. More importantly, it is time to push for professors to acknowledge events that happen on campus, around the country, or in the world that may cause you or other students stress.

This is also a familiar story: Out of 6 classes, 6 of the 6 syllabi have the grading breakdown. 6 of the 6 syllabi have a tentative topics schedule. 6 of the 6 syllabi state the Academic Code of Integrity. 2 of the 6 syllabi have statements about accommodations for students with disabilities. 1 of the 6 syllabi has a statement about diversity and inclusion in the classroom. **0 of the 6 syllabi have a statement discussing the importance of mental health, self-care, and the mental health care resources available on the University's campus.** This absence is an absolute disservice to students, so we propose the following:

“In order to allow any person to engage in any study, Cornell University seeks to support all aspects of student health. The same academic accommodations will be given to both mental health concerns and physical illnesses. As part of that oath, the Administration and Faculty of Cornell support the mental health of all students belonging to our diverse study body and wish to emphasize the following FREE mental health resources:

Cornell Health

607-255-5155

Includes 24/7 Crisis Counseling and Intervention & Let's Talk

Let's Talk

Drop in professional consultation

607-255-5155 (ext. 2)

Multiple locations

<https://health.cornell.edu/services/counseling-psychiatry/lets-talk>

EARS Counseling

Empathy Assistance and Referral Services

Peer-lead counseling

607-255-EARS

213 Willard Straight Hall

<http://orgsync.rso.cornell.edu/org/ears>” *

**The above statement is the suggested standard. Professors may add content with the approval of their department.*

This is a call upon the faculty of Cornell to take action now, right in the classroom, by implementing a Mental Health clause in their syllabi. It is a call upon the students to bring this to their attention. There is no time like the present and this is simply one step in the right direction toward a positive shift in campus culture. There can be no more “after” when the “now” could be life or death.