

Why Institutions Are Investing in Students' Coping and Resilience Skills

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Student Affairs Forum

Developing Coping and Resilience Skills to Advance Student Success

As counseling centers and related services struggle to keep pace with the escalating number of students seeking support, student affairs leaders are seeking ways to proactively address student needs. EAB recommends institutions use **scalable, targeted interventions to get ahead of students' mental health concerns** and help at-risk students build the skills necessary to succeed on campus.

Upcoming Webconferences On This Research

[How to Promote Resilience in the First Year](#)

April 25, 2:00-2:30pm ET

[Partnering with Faculty on Well-Being Initiatives](#)

August 15, 1:00-1:30pm ET

[Targeting Resilience at High-Stress Moments](#)

September 5, 1:00-1:30pm ET

On-Demand Webconference Related to This Research

[Connecting Low-Risk Students to Meaningful Mental Health Resources on Campus](#)

Visit [EAB's Mental Health Services Resource Center](#) for additional insights, tools, and resources.

Grit, Coping, and Resilience in the Headlines

No Shortage of Articles Highlighting Skill Gap Among Current Students



The Coddling of the American Mind



Top Students, Too, Aren't Always Ready for College



Students Should Be Taught Resilience, but Educators Struggle With the Best Way Forward



Succeeding in the Global Economy: The Skill Employers Really Want From New Recruits



Homework Therapists' Job: Help Solve Math Problems, and Emotional Ones



Declining Student Resilience: A Serious Problem for Colleges

Students Struggle to Cope With Day-to-Day Challenges



Students struggle to prioritize their work with a **lack of parental oversight**



Students **clash with new roommates** who they do not know



High-achieving students struggle to persevere after they **fail a test**



Students **blame their professors** when they struggle to learn content

Source: Cross Country Checkup. "Student Should Be Taught Resilience, But Educators Struggle with the Best Way Forward." *CBC Radio*, February 9, 2018; Gray, Peter. "Declining Student Resilience: A Serious Problem for Colleges," *Psychology Today*, September 22, 2015; Lukianoff, Greg And Jonathan Haidt. "The Coddling of the American Mind." *The Atlantic*, September, 2015; Petroff, Alanna. "The Skill Employers Really Want From New Recruits," *CNN Money*, September 23, 2016; Spencer, Kyle. "Homework Therapists' Job: Help Solve Math Problems, and Emotional Ones," *The New York Times*, April 4, 2018; Tuttle Hansen, Elaine. "Top Students, Too, Aren't Always Ready for College," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 11, 2013, EAB interviews and analysis.



Defining Our Terms

A Variety of Concepts That Address These Issues

Grit: Passion and sustained persistence applied toward long-term achievement, with no particular concern for rewards or recognition along the way

Resilience: Ability to face, overcome, and be strengthened by life's adversities and challenges

Growth Mindset: Belief that basic talents can be developed through dedication and hard work – brains and talent are just the starting point

Positive Education: Educational strategy that blends academic learning with an emphasis on wellbeing

“

Same Problem, Different Names

“Today’s students are bright, eager, academically ready, and take direction well. They have lots of good qualities but don’t have the fundamental skills to take agency in their lives. **Call it a lack of coping, resilience, grit, or positive education... they lack the necessary skills to succeed.**”

*Vice President of Student Affairs
Public Research University*

”

Source: Duckworth, Angela. *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. New York: Scribner, 2016; Dweck, Carol. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Random House, 2006; Newman, Tony. *What Works in Building Resilience?* London: Barnardo's, 2004; Seligman, Martin, et al. “Positive Education: Positive Psychology and Classroom Interventions.” *Oxford Review of Education* 35:3 (2009): 293-311; EAB interviews and analysis.

Examining the Root Cause

Two Prominent Theories About Why Students Lack Coping and Resilience Skills



Today's Students Are 'Soft'

- "Helicopter" parents contribute to **lack of independence**
- Parents are reluctant to see their children struggle and step in to **shield them from consequences**
- Students **lack experiences and coping skills** that help them to bounce back from challenges
- Failure-averse students **shut down** when they do not succeed



Today's Students Face More Challenges

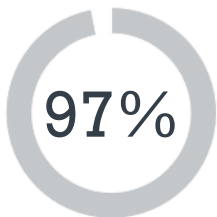
- Student **feel uncertain about the future** in a charged and tumultuous political climate
- High cost of college and the **burden of student debt** adds to students' stress and anxiety
- **Social pressures and FOMO** present 24/7 through social media
- **Competitive job** market magnifies student anxiety



A Top-of-Mind Issue for EAB Members

A Growing Appetite for Preventive Support

Grit and Resilience Hot Topics Across Student Affairs



Of Student Affairs Forum members rated Growing Grit and Resilience as an **important priority**

Selected Presentations from NASPA and ACPA Conferences

- ✓ *Getting Gritty: Teaching Students to Embrace Failure as a Key to Growth*
- ✓ *Reframing Resilience / Failing Brilliantly*
- ✓ *A Question of Resilience*
- ✓ *No Time For That?: Developing Career Resilience in Nontraditional Students*

“

There's an idea that there is something wrong with students today. But that's because people are failing to recognize the normal challenges of jumping into difficult work (leaving home). These changes highlight where the gaps are between people's current skills and their aspirations. **There's not something wrong with the students and there is not something wrong with the college – that's exactly what we're here to do.**

Abigail Lipson
Director of the Success-Failure Project
Harvard University

”



“Every Year is Record Breaking”

Students’ Appetite for Mental Health Support Continues to Grow

Counseling Center Demand Shows No Sign of Slowing



5x

Rate at which demand for counseling center appointments **outpaced enrollment growth**



12 days

Median wait time for individual therapy appointments on campuses that use a waitlist

Low-Risk Students Contribute to Growing Demand

Who are low-risk students?



Not at risk of hurting or harming themselves or others



Developmental challenges



General anxiety or stress exacerbated by the academic or political environment



Loneliness or social isolation

“Demand for mental health support is rapidly growing ... In response, we have poured more and more resources into clinical support services. **Despite the additional investment, both waiting times and student distress are increasing.**”

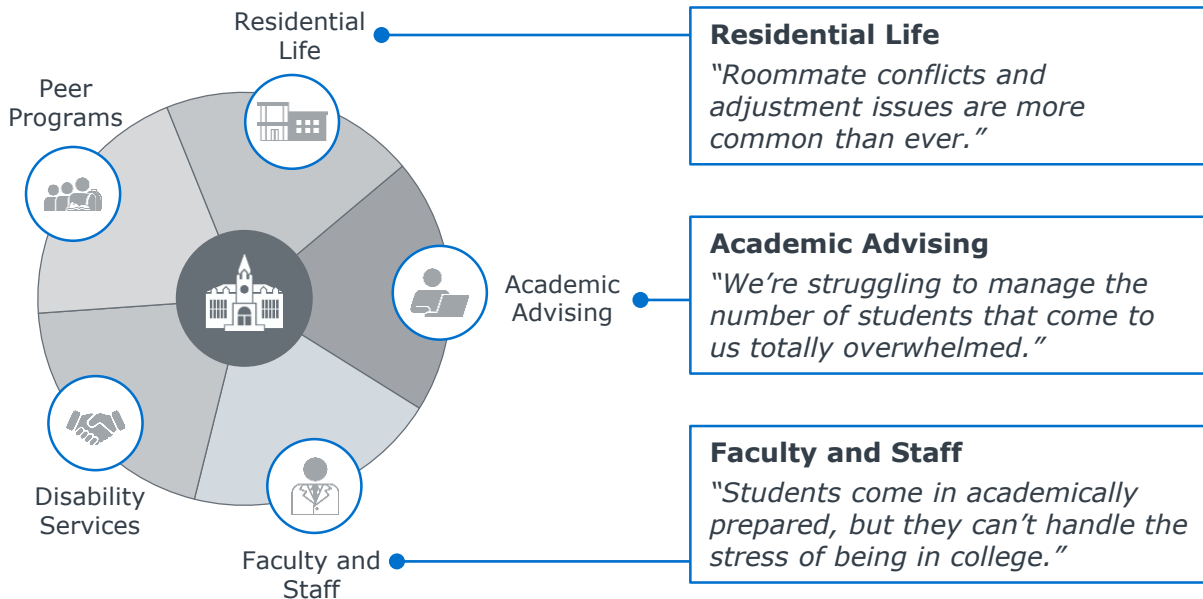
*Vice-Provost and Dean of Students
University of Alberta*

Source: LeViness, Peter, Carolyn Bershad, and Kim Gorman. “Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors Annual Survey,” 2018; Center for Collegiate Mental Health, [2015 Annual Report](#); Costopolous, Andre. “Our Role is to Support Students When They Are Ready to be Students,” *University Affairs*, August 25, 2017; EAB interviews and analysis.

Demand Not Just Limited to Counseling

Increasingly Students Look for Help Earlier and In a Variety of Places

Demand Spills Over to Other Areas on Campus



“Helping Our Students Thrive”

Retention and Student Success Impacts Abound

10%

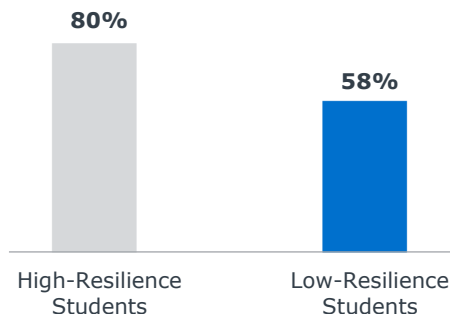
Of low-resilience first-year students persevere through academic challenges¹

0.90

Difference between low resilience and high resilience first-year students' average GPAs²

First- to Second-Year Retention

By Resilience Level, 2014-15



“

I believe this impacts retention - **students who are better able to manage their anxiety are more likely to continue.** We became concerned when students indicated they were leaving because of anxiety or performance issues in the classroom.

*Susan Lantz, Vice President for Student Life
Susquehanna University*

”

1) Compared to 75% of high-resilience first-year students

2) 3.10 for high-resilience first-year students and 2.20 for low-resilience first-year students

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The Shifting Enrollment Landscape

Resilience and Well-Being Initiatives Can Be a Competitive Advantage

Increasingly Volatile Enrollment Conditions...

36

States will see slower growth or declines in the high school graduation rate

64%

Of colleges did not meet new student enrollment targets in 2017

CHRONICLE SPECIAL REPORT

"Marketing to Survive"

Colleges Hone Their Search for a Competitive Advantage

"A Population in Flux Forces Colleges to Adapt"

Colleges are trying an array of strategies in response to changes

”

A New Competitive Advantage

It's more and more common to hear parents and families asking about the availability of mental health and well-being resources on campus during the admissions process. **This creates a lot of pressure to make sure we're prepared to answer those questions** and provide support that will be compelling to students and their parents."

*Dean of Students
Private College*

Source: Hoover, Eric and Beckie Supiano. "A Population in Flux Forces Colleges to Adapt." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 6, 2016; Hoover, Eric. "Marketing to Survive." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 29, 2016; Selingo J. The Future of Enrollment, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2017. Jaschik, Scott. "The 2017 Survey of Admissions Directors: Pressure All Around," *Inside Higher Ed*, September 13, 2017; and EAB interviews and analysis.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Key Next Steps for Student Affairs Leaders

“

Maximize Current Efforts

“One of the things we realized quickly was we can’t solely deliver one-on-one support on this size of a campus. **We needed to figure out a way to scale up support for the masses and maximize our efforts.**”

*Jody Donovan
Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs
and Dean of Students
Colorado State University*

”

“

Strategically Expand Efforts

“We are lucky to have strong support from our leadership for addressing coping and resilience skills. **Our biggest challenge is figuring out what to invest in.** We have to make sure whatever we commit to is responsive to student needs, speaks to their interest, and benefits them in a meaningful way.”

*K.C. Mmeje
Vice President of Student Affairs
Southern Methodist University*

”

Study Roadmap

Developing Coping and Resilience Skills to Advance Student Success

Implementing and Refining Resilience Initiatives



Building a Campus-Wide Network



1

Prime Students
Early in the **First
Year**



2

**Target
Interventions**
Beyond the First
Year



3

Leverage **Campus
Partners** to Scale
Reach



4

Coda: Charting
a Path to an
**Institutional
Framework**



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A Holistic Approach to Campus Wellness

Two Broad-Based Initiatives



United States

Vision

- ☒ Campus communities in which all members live long, healthy lives

Select Goals

- Create health-promoting social and physical environments
- Support efforts to increase academic success, productivity, retention, and life-long learning
- Promote quality of life, healthy development, and positive health behaviors

OKANAGAN CHARTER

AN INTERNATIONAL CHARTER
FOR HEALTH PROMOTING
UNIVERSITIES & COLLEGES

International

Goals

- ☒ Embed health into all aspects of campus culture
- ☒ Lead health promotion action and collaboration locally and globally

Select Action Areas

- Generate thriving communities and a culture of well-being by creating empowered, connected, and resilient campuses
- Create or re-orient campus services to support equitable access and enhance health and well-being

Getting Everyone on the Same Page

Western University Adopts Comprehensive Plan for Mental Health and Wellness

Vision for Student Mental Health and Wellness

“**To create a university campus that is resilient and cares about mental health and wellness**, where students receive support as needed, where talking and learning about mental health reduces and eliminates the stigma surrounding mental health issues, and where we build a more supportive and inclusive campus environment **to enhance all students’ potential for success.**”

Western’s Student Mental Health and Wellness Strategic Plan

Key Goals

- ✓ Cultivate institutional commitment for student mental health at all levels of the university
- ✓ Sustain and strengthen student resilience
- ✓ Advance practice and policy that promotes resilience and wellness

Key Action Items



Increase data collection and assessment of key indicators of student mental health and wellness



Increase and enhance training and supports for student helpers, leaders and mentors across campus



Establish a Wellness Innovation Fund to support programs and services that promote wellness on campus

Rise of Senior Wellness Positions

Institutions Seek Experienced Leaders to Integrate Work on Campus

Apply Now: Chief Wellness Officer

Reports To: Chief Student Affairs Officer

Job Responsibilities

- Leads all aspects of integrated student health and wellness programs and initiatives across campus
- Responsible for long-term strategic vision for holistic campus well-being
- Oversees the work of:
 - Counseling and Psychological Services
 - University Health Services
 - Wellness Promotion
 - Campus Recreation
 - Spiritual Life

Qualifications

- Minimum of master's degree in health, counseling, or wellness; preference for credentialed clinicians and/or MD, PsyD, or PhD
- Significant experience in health policy, planning, or administration
- 7-10 years progressively higher responsibility in higher education

Early Adopters



Chief Wellness Officer



Associate Vice President for
Community Health and Well-Being



Associate Dean of Health and
Wellness



Director of Wellbeing

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Student Affairs Forum

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