

April 16, 2021

Progress Report on Recommendations from the President's Task Force on Mental Health

Background

Stevens is deeply committed to the health and well-being of its student body. To address the needs of our students, Stevens has developed a comprehensive [mental health and suicide prevention plan](#) which incorporates guidance from the Jed Foundation, a leader in the field of university suicide prevention. One of the core features of the Stevens' plan is to "Make Seeking Help Our Strength." It is not always easy for students to seek help for emotional and psychological issues, and in the realm of mental health it is understood that there are often significant barriers to help-seeking. For these reasons, President Nariman Farvardin focused the Task Force on strategies to increase help-seeking behavior among the student body at Stevens.

Stevens works closely with the [Jed Foundation](#) toward the continued development and expansion of systems, programs, and policies that promote mental health and suicide prevention. In 2013, Stevens was awarded the JedCampus Seal as part of the first cohort of schools in the nation to achieve this recognition. The JedCampus Seal is awarded to colleges and universities who have shown they employ a comprehensive, community-based approach to mental health care. The President's Task Force on Mental Health was charged with developing recommendations to address one of the most complex and multi-layered aspects of the Jed comprehensive approach: *Increase Help-Seeking Behavior - Make Seeking Help Our Strength*. The Task Force's charge is to identify ways to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness and to encourage students to seek help.

Task Force Recommendations and Progress

Each of the three Task Force subgroups worked to develop and prioritize a set of recommendations. All recommendations from the subgroups were ranked by all Task Force members and are listed below in priority order. In addition, information has been provided on progress on each recommendation as of April 16, 2021.

1. Increase Access to Mental Health Services

Recommendation: Expand student access to mental health by expanding Stevens' counseling staff, leveraging technology, increasing student access to local off-campus providers, and overcoming barriers imposed by limited insurance coverage.

Progress:

- In April 2020, in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Office of Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) developed a telehealth capacity which greatly expanded its ability to reach students.
- In August 2020, CAPS hired a new full-time mental health clinician with expertise in the treatment of underrepresented minority students.

- In September 2020, CAPS expanded its hours and now provides clinical hours in the evening.
- As of February 2021, Stevens has contracted with UWill to provide virtual counseling services for online students who reside outside of New York and New Jersey and cannot receive services from the CAPS staff due to state licensing requirements.
- As of April 12, 2021, Stevens has contracted with Protocall to provide after hours and weekend crisis counseling services via telephone to students who contact CAPS when the office is not open.
- Stevens continues to require that all students maintain their health insurance while enrolled. We continue to inform students of the importance of maintaining their coverage throughout the academic year.

2. Provide Education to Gatekeepers in Our Community

Recommendation: Provide training to gatekeepers (parents, classmates, friends, faculty, and staff) to recognize a student in crisis and the warning signs that someone may be contemplating suicide.

Progress:

- As of Fall 2020, education on mental health and suicide prevention is now mandatory for all faculty and staff. Stevens has contracted with Kognito to provide an interactive on-line module accessible through the University's compliance system. Compliance is monitored by Human Resources.
- The CAPS team provides mental health workshops to various groups, including Athletics staff, faculty departments, student groups, fraternities and sororities, athletic teams, and others.
- As part of orientation, new students receive information on student mental health services on campus as well as programming designed to teach basic skills for emotional coping.
- All Resident Assistants receive mental health training; this training has always been provided as part of their orientation and training.
- Staff members in the Division of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs have received additional mental health training through the QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) program. This program is also available upon request to other divisions and groups on campus.
- As part of both New Family Orientation and Family Weekend each fall, sessions regarding student mental health are offered to parents and families.
- Twice a year, CAPS offer an optional hour-long Warning Signs training for all faculty and staff.

3. Provide Clear Mental Health Information to Faculty and Ask Them to Share the Information with Students

Recommendation: Establish a formal mechanism to ensure that Student Affairs and CAPS staff collaborate with the Provost's Office and the deans of the schools to provide mental health and emergency information for faculty to share with students at the start of each semester.

Progress:

- An Emergency Information slide has been developed and shared with faculty to review with students on the first day of class.
- Information regarding wellness resources was added to the Canvas Learning Management System starting in Fall 2020.
- Faculty have been asked to include a wellness and emergency resources statement (provided via template) in their syllabi.

4. Develop a 'Stevens Cares' Initiative

Recommendation: Establish a series of programs and guidelines to create an ecosystem of caring for students facilitated by faculty and staff.

Progress:

- Quack Chats, Pancakes with the President, Pizza with the Provost, and Coffee with a Cop will continue, and additional programs will be added post-pandemic.
- Student Advisory Groups have been established for each of the four schools/colleges.
- "Let's Talk" pop ups will be implemented 2-3 times per semester in high traffic campus locations post-pandemic.
- A stronger relationship is being developed with Undergraduate Academics and academic advisors with CAPS to promote regular sharing of information about students with academic difficulties and other concerns.

5. Empower Students to Support Other Students

Recommendation: Provide opportunities for students to assist and support their fellow students in distress.

Progress:

- QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) has been offered to student groups interested in learning more about mental health and the warning signs exhibited by students in distress or crisis.
- Student peers already engage in basic mental health psychoeducational programming as members of CAPS' peer educator program.

6. Assess Our Campus Culture

Recommendation: Develop tools to assess our current campus culture surrounding stigma about mental health issues and wellness.

Progress:

- These assessments have been postponed until after the pandemic.

7. Incorporate Wellness and Resiliency into the Curriculum (4.3)

Recommendation: Determine avenues for integrating mental and emotional wellness education into the curriculum. Provide the same attention to emotional well-being as is provided to physical well-being.

Progress:

- CAPS offers a small number of wellness courses to fulfill the Physical Education (PE) requirement with plans to expand these offerings in 2021-2022 to include Koru Mindfulness, an evidence-based mindfulness curriculum for college and university students.

8. Increase Awareness Programming for Our Campus Community

Recommendations: Increase the number of programs on campus that bring attention to and foster discussion of stigma about mental health issues, including lectures or seminars.

Progress:

- On February 24, 2021, as part of the [Provost's Lecture Series on Women in Leadership](#) Gretchen Rubin, author of the bestseller [The Happiness Project](#), presented her lecture, "How to Be Happier, Healthier and More Productive in the Age of COVID-19."
- CAPS began posting to Instagram regularly beginning in Fall 2020 on a wide range of topics related to mental health and help-seeking.

9. Develop a Mental Health Resources Marketing Plan

Recommendation: Market the services offered by CAPS heavily to students.

Progress:

- Phone numbers for CAPS and the National Suicide Hotline were added to the back of the Student ID cards.
- CAPS expanded its social media campaigning significantly in 2021-2022, posting regularly to the Stevens Students instagram account with information about CAPS and education about a variety of mental health issues.

10. Develop a Multi-Media Self-Reflection Campaign

Recommendation: Develop a multi-media campaign to encourage students to reflect on their well-being and consider seeking support.

Progress:

- Initiatives are being developed.

11. Improve Signage Directing Students to the Wellness Center

Recommendation: The Wellness Center is relatively new and set back from the rest of the campus. Better signage would assist students in locating the building.

Progress:

- Discussions underway with the Division of Facilities.

12. Engage in External Partnerships and Coalitions that Support Our Mission

Recommendation: Collaborate with organizations external to our immediate community who have a shared interest in reducing the stigma associated with help-seeking. Collaborate with them to learn more about best practices, gain access to valuable resources, and share expertise.

Progress:

- Initiatives are underway; Stevens already has strong pre-existing relationships with both the Jed Foundation and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention with whom we co-host the annual Hoboken Out of Darkness suicide prevention walk.

13. Increase Faith-Based Resources and Services on Campus (3.1)

Recommendations: Find ways to bring faith-based resources and services to campus. Explore avenues for students to find support in cultural and religious institutions and practices.

Progress:

- Beginning in Fall 2021 (post pandemic) Stevens will open a Quiet Space for meditation, prayer, and reflection in the Wellness Center on campus.
- Stevens has recently developed a [website](#) focused on Spiritual resources for Stevens' students.