

# Recommendations of the President's Task Force on Mental Health

Stevens Institute of Technology

November 10, 2020



## Introduction

On July 9, 2019, President Farvardin [announced the formation of a task force](#) that included representatives from various sectors of the campus community: students, faculty, staff, alumni, and parents, with the charge for the 2019-20 academic year to focus on “Make Seeking Help Our Strength,” that is, to increase help-seeking behavior among Stevens students. Vice President for Enrollment and Student Affairs Marybeth Murphy and Dean of the College of Arts and Letters Dr. Kelland Thomas were named co-chairs, and a steering committee that included the co-chairs and Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs Dr. Sara Klein and Director of Counseling and Psychological Services Dr. Eric Rose was formed.

The Steering Committee met several times to plan and review the work of the full Task Force and also established three sub-committees: Collaboration, Communication, and Culture. Each Task Force member was assigned or volunteered to join at least one sub-committee. Four meetings of the full Task Force were planned for the 2019-20 academic year and sub-committee meetings were held outside of full Task Force meetings. One of the planned Task Force meetings was cancelled due to the pandemic; however, the full Task Force and subgroups continued to meet and make progress after Stevens transitioned to online learning and remote business operations in mid-March 2020 using a combination of online collaboration tools.

## Members of the President’s Task Force on Mental Health

Marybeth Murphy, Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, *Co-Chair*  
Kelland Thomas, Dean of the College of Arts and Letters, *Co-Chair*

Cay Berman, President, Active Minds Student Chapter  
Nathalie Waite Brown, Director, Graduate Student Affairs  
Jason Chlus / Samantha Molla, President of SGA  
Rosemary Dice, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Academics  
Susan Gross, Assistant Vice President, Financial Aid and Undergraduate Admissions  
Penelope Halkiadakis, Class of 2019  
Devesh Jain, President of Graduate Student Council  
Sara Klein, Assistant Vice President, Student Affairs  
Ashley Lytle, Assistant Professor, Psychology, CAL  
Theresa MacPhail, Assistant Professor, Science and Technology, CAL  
Coral Matar, Public Health Professional and Stevens Parent  
Beth McGrath, Vice President, Government and Community Relations/Chief of Staff  
Seth Moncrease, Director, Pre-College Programs  
Warren Petty, Vice President, Human Resources  
Russ Rogers, Director, Department of Physical Education, Athletics and Recreation  
Eric Rose, Director, Counseling and Psychological Services  
Joelle Saad-Lesser, Associate Industry Professor, School of Business  
Dibyendu (Dibs) Sarkar, Chair, Faculty Senate  
Ed Stukane, Vice President, Communications and Marketing (or designee)  
Ye Yang, Associate Professor, School of Systems and Enterprise  
David Zeng, Vice Provost, Academic Innovation and Faculty Affairs

## Background

Stevens is deeply committed to the health and well-being of its student body. In recent years, significant attention has been drawn to the mental health challenges facing today’s university students. To address these challenges, 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.

### ***Meetings of the Task Force***

- **September 25, 2019.** President Farvardin charged the Task Force to identify strategies and develop recommendations to increase help-seeking among the student body. Dr. Sara Klein and Dr. Eric Rose presented an overview of mental health and suicide prevention resources at Stevens. Dr. Ashley Lytle, Assistant Professor in the College of Arts and Letters, shared a presentation on stigma and its relationship to mental health and help-seeking behavior. Task Force members were subsequently assigned to one of three subgroups (Collaboration, Communication, or Culture) previously identified by the Steering Committee. Subgroups met to discuss and plan their next steps.
- **December 9, 2019.** The Task Force heard a presentation from Diana Cusumano, senior campus advisor from the Jed Foundation. Ms. Cusumano discussed the role of the Jed Foundation and how Jed assists colleges and universities as they develop campus-wide suicide prevention plans. She also commended the significant positive progress that Stevens has made during its tenure as a Jed Campus school. She also expressed enthusiasm for Stevens' completion of the Jed program and transition into the role of program mentors for other institutions in the future. Dr. Sara Klein presented to the group about recent progress that has been made on Stevens' mental health and suicide prevention plan. Dr. Eric Rose presented an overview of research on the factors that influence college student help-seeking behavior. The three subgroups once again convened to discuss and share information and ideas.
- **March 11, 2020.** A full meeting of the Task Force, which was planned for this date, was postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak. In lieu of the in-person meeting of the full Task Force, each subgroup convened remotely.
- **May 21, 2020.** A full meeting of the Task Force was held via Zoom. Each subgroup shared their preliminary recommendations with the full Task Force. Recommendations were discussed by all participants, and a plan was developed for further evaluating and prioritizing the recommendations.

### **Task Force Subgroups**

From the membership of the Mental Health Task Force, three subgroups were formed and asked to provide recommendations for consideration by the Task Force.

#### ***Collaboration Subgroup***

##### *Goals*

- To develop recommendations grounded in research and best practices related to areas for collaboration that would promote help-seeking behaviors among Stevens students.
- Consider how to leverage partnerships internal and external to Stevens.

##### *Membership*

E. Rose (Chair), R. Rogers, D. Zeng, B. McGrath, Y. Yang, C. Matar, C. Berman, P. Halkiadakis

#### ***Communication Subgroup***

### Goals

- Develop a set of recommendations grounded in research and best practices related to communication methods and strategies to encourage help-seeking among students
- Recommend methods to promote the work and outcomes of the task force

### Membership

S. Klein (Chair), E. Stukane, D. Sarkar, S. Moncrease, R. Dice, D. Jain, J. Chlus **Culture Subgroup**

### Goals

- Explore how the Stevens culture impacts help-seeking behavior and mental health challenges
- Develop a set of recommendations grounded in research and best practices that can have a positive impact on campus culture

### Membership

K. Thomas (Chair), T. MacPhail, N. Waite, W. Petty, S. Gross, A. Lytle, P. Halkiadakis

## Task Force Recommendations

Each of the three subgroups worked to develop and prioritize a set of recommendations. On May 21, 2020 the full Task Force met to consider all recommendations.

All recommendations from the subgroups were ranked by all Task Force members on a scale of 1 - 5 with 1 being 'No Support' and 5 being 'Very Strong Support'. All subgroup recommendations received an average score of at least a 3, which was 'Support'. The subgroup recommendations are listed below in ranked order of support by the Full Task Force and the average score is listed in parentheses for each recommendation.

### Recommendations in Order of Support

#### 1. Increase Access to Mental Health Services (4.6)

- a. *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.
- b. *Options for Further Consideration:*
  - i. Hire a CAPS evening team with clinical staff and administrative support.
  - ii. Collaborate with local community providers to provide information on local therapists and what types of insurance they accept
  - iii. Establish and develop enforcement mechanisms to be sure that students maintain adequate health insurance coverage throughout the academic year.

#### 2. Provide Education to Gatekeepers in Our Community (4.5)

- a. *Recommendation:* Provide training to gatekeepers (parents, classmates, friends, faculty and staff) to recognize a crisis and the warning signs that someone may be contemplating suicide.
- b. *Options for Further Consideration:*
  - i. Expand information on the Stevens website to offer guidance to gatekeepers, including parents, faculty and other students.
  - ii. Offer a range of trainings, such as :
    - "Mental Health First Aid" for those who want an advanced course
    - QPR (Question, Persuade and Refer) to those who want to participate in a 60-minute course focused exclusively on suicide prevention.

- A 30-45 minute course for those with time constraints.
- Require that all faculty and staff complete a mental health training.
- Use the “Athletics Mental Health Emergency Plan” as a framework for more general guidance regarding mental health emergency situations and share with faculty and administrators as a training tool.

### 3. Provide Clear Mental Health Information to Faculty and Ask Them to Share the Information with Students (4.5)

- 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.
- Options For Further Consideration:*
  - Remind faculty to share Emergency Information with their students on the first day of class.
  - Remind faculty to add a statement about campus wellness resources in all syllabi. Consider adding language to syllabi templates for courses in Canvas with campus wellness and emergency information.

### 4. Develop a ‘Stevens Cares’ Initiative (4.4)

- Recommendation:* Establish a series of programs and guidelines to create an ecosystem of caring for students facilitated by faculty and staff.
- Options for Consideration:*
  - Quack Snacks.** Have one day each semester where all offices hand out a treat to students.
  - Quack Chats.** Designated staff call each student early each semester to offer welcome and support and to answer any questions.
  - Pancakes with the President, Pizza with the Provost, Coffee with a Cop.** Continue and expand programs like these.
  - Student Advisory Groups with each School Dean.** Establish or continue these initiatives where SGA representatives speak with Deans about issues of mental health and care.
  - First Year Flock.** Pair staff members with first-year students to ensure each student connects with at least one staff member.
  - ‘Let’s Talk’ Pop Ups.** Implement ‘Let’s Talk’ pop-ups 2-3 times per semester in high traffic campus locations.
  - Academic Advisement** Continuously evaluate and improve systems and structures to ensure that all students receive regular, consistent, effective academic advisement

### 5. Empower Students to Support Other Students (4.3)

- Recommendation:* Provide opportunities for students to assist and support their fellow students in distress.
- Options for Consideration:*
  - Establish a Student Support Network - a group of peers trained to identify and refer peers at risk. Also consider establishing SHAPE, a student support network geared towards athletes, on campus
  - Provide more comprehensive mental health training to students who are interested. Consider offering Mental Health First Aid or other wellness education classes as options to fulfill Stevens Physical Education (PE) requirement.
  - Provide support to the Active Minds student organization on campus to encourage creative student-led initiatives to share student help-seeking stories and de-stigmatize seeking help for mental illness.
  - Create and implement mental health campaigns that encourage help-seeking behaviors including:

- Reduce the mystery and unknowns of counseling
- Reduce student fears of submitting a CARE report about a friend
- Educate students about the impact of using fatalistic language
- Improve CAPS' reputation among students by sharing success stories and data

## 6. Assess Our Campus Culture (4.3)

- Recommendation:* Develop tools to assess our current campus culture surrounding stigma about mental health issues, resiliency and wellness.
- Options for Consideration:*
  - include both quantitative and qualitative assessment methods, with survey instruments and focus groups. Involve and assess multiple constituencies on campus, including faculty, students, and administrators. Select a survey instrument that captures cultural attitudes, religious beliefs, and perceptions of family and community beliefs about mental health stigma, as well as perceptions about the culture at Stevens, the use of campus resources such as CAPS, and the help-seeking behaviors of students. Review and share existing survey data (NSSE, Princeton Review, etc.) and consider action items based on the results.
  - Collect and analyze aggregate data from the CARE Team and CAPS to contribute to a campus-wide assessment of attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about mental health-related stigma.

## 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.
- Options for Consideration:*
  - Reconsider the four-course, zero-credit Physical Education (PE) requirement of the undergraduate curriculum:
  - Consider offering a Wellness curriculum as part of the 4-course PE requirement so that Mental Health training and awareness is embedded in that sequence.
  - Consider offering QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) or Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Training as part of, or an offering within, the wellness curriculum or to fulfill the PE requirement.
  - Consider offering QPR and/or MHFA (Mental Health First Aid) Certification as part of the first-year curriculum

## 8. Increase Awareness Programming for Our Campus Community (4.3)

- 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.
- Options for Consideration:*
  - Consider Mental Health programs presented by student peer leadership.
  - Consider high-visibility speakers or a lecture series that address stigma and provide personal experience and perspectives. Suggested themes for a lecture series include: "Happiness and Failure", "The Bounce Back", etc.
  - Consider asking faculty, administrators, senior leaders and students to share personal experiences with stigma and help-seeking.
  - Leverage current speaker series by adding a lecture on mental health awareness including the President's Distinguished Lecture Series, Provost's Lecture, Academic unit-level speaker series or colloquia.
  - Increase awareness and educate our community about mental health issues through social media to decrease stigma about help-seeking.

## 9. Develop a Mental Health Resources Marketing Plan (4.1)

- a. *Recommendation:* Market the services offered by CAPS heavily to students.
- b. *Options for Consideration:*
  - i. Add phone numbers for CAPS and Crisis Text Line to the back of the Student ID card
  - ii. Create brief videos of each CAPS counselor introducing themselves (bilingual counselors should speak in both languages) on the CAPS website
  - iii. Add mental health resources on MyStevens portal homepage
  - iv. Create a video of a student seeking counseling in both English and Mandarin for CAPS website
  - v. Create marketing materials for CAPS that are distributed on a cycle at four points during each academic year (October 1, December 1, February 1, April 1)
  - vi. Encourage students to tell a friend about CAPS by creating small backpack pins and tech stickers to hand out in the reception areas of student-facing offices and at tabling events.

## 10. Develop a Multi-Media Self-Reflection Campaign (3.9)

- a. *Recommendation:* Develop a multi-media campaign to encourage students to reflect on their well-being and consider seeking support.
- b. *Options for Consideration:*
  - i. Consider using questions such as “Are you ok?” “Want to talk?” “How do you feel today?” as part of the campaign.
  - ii. Be sure that all messages include information about CAPS and how to schedule an initial appointment
  - iii. Communicate the campaign through multiple channels:
    - 1. Utilize traditional means such as flyers throughout campus, information on myStevens portal, electronic sign boards, and students’ canvas inboxes, as well through Resident Assistants, Peer Leaders, and the Student Government Association
    - 2. Consider using printed napkins in dining locations, temporary images on campus paths, pull-up signage in high-traffic locations, and student give-a-ways including branded rubber ducks, cell phone pop sockets, laptop stickers

## 11. Improve Signage Directing Students to the Wellness Center (3.9)

- a. *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.
- b. *Options for Consideration:*
  - i. Add more signs directing students to the building. Possible areas for signage include near the Schaefer Athletic Center and in the area outside of Humphreys Hall and the Student Center.

## 12. Engage in External Partnerships and Coalitions that Support Our Mission (3.7)

- a. *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.
- b. *Options for Consideration:*
  - i. Collaborate with Hudson County Mental Health Board (and commissioner). Access Mental Health First Aid courses, Stigma Free Toolkits, etc.
  - ii. Collaborate with other universities by developing or entering into a consortium to share and promote best practices related to improving help-seeking and reducing stigma.
  - iii. Consider collaborating with Mental Health America, a nationally recognized organization with considerable history and expertise to access valuable resources such as large-scale

training and programs and national certification as a stigma free site.

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

- a. *Recommendations:* Find ways to bring faith-based resources and services to campus. Explore avenues for Stevens students to find support in cultural and religious institutions and practices.
- b. *Options for Consideration:*
  - i. Consider establishing an Interfaith Center on campus to serve as locus on campus for programming around mental health issues and serve to raise awareness about these issues and improve our campus culture.
  - ii. Expand existing spiritual and faith-based resources on campus
  - iii. Explore collaborations with local faith-based institutions and organizations

### **A Concluding Statement from the Co-Chairs**

The members of Task Force brought a range of experiences, expertise, and perspectives to their work, and the comprehensive set of recommendations reflects this diversity. The Task Force began its work prior to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and the transition to online learning and remote business operations, which have had significant impact on the campus environment and interactions with and among students. Importantly, the need for mental health services and help-seeking behavior has increased among all sectors of our population and among our student community; however, the modes of monitoring student wellness and delivering mental health services have changed considerably during the pandemic. We believe that the forgoing summary and extensive contributions and of the Task Force remain valid, but in light of the ongoing health crisis, we recommend focusing on Recommendations 1-5 in the short-term.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of The President's Task Force on Mental Health,

Marybeth Murphy  
Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs

Kelland Thomas  
Dean, College of Arts and Letters