[School Therapy] Sucks, Here's How to Fix it:

A Multi-year Plan and Analysis on University Mental Health Services.

Written by: Tristan A. Locks, [and others…]

Project Report:

For those of us who have attended or are currently attending college, it is well known that these years are in some ways meant to be challenging. College in theory, should be the time in a young adult's life where risk is low, creativity is high, and mistakes are made in a safe space. But, between managing course work, a job, and trying to have a social life, it can sometimes feel like there are not enough hours in the day to do everything. Coupled with the dramatic increase in college tuition and the increasingly unstable world around us, college students are at wit's end. Let us not forget to mention how difficult it is to make the transition from College into "the real world." Although college can still be seen as a net positive, since the COVID-19 outbreak swept the world, the college experience has become even more difficult. As rapid changes are occurring in and outside of the dorms, we as college students often wonder, who is going to help us and where can we turn to? With that in mind, our group is happy to report on what we found related to our University's Mental Health Services, as well as to present a Comprehensive 4 – Year plan to improve its functionality.

For some additional context as to why we chose this topic for our semester-long project, we turn to a Jed Foundation survey for the answers. Their research suggests that the pandemic has led to an increase in student-affected psychological disorders, including, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and difficulty sleeping. Additionally, the pandemic along with the related rise in racism and xenophobia has disproportionately affected marginalized groups. These conditions further exacerbate the issues of mental health on University campuses. (Keierleber, Yahoo!) Not only are students facing an unprecedented mental health crisis, but just like with the pandemic, the resources available to support the communities most affected are simply nonexistent. According to a study conducted by the American College Health Association and the Healthy Minds Network, which

surveyed about 18,700 students across 14 campuses, many students reported that they found it

harder to connect to mental health services amidst the pandemic. (Wintersmith, GBH).

It was with these facts in mind that our group began brainstorming about how University

Mental Health services could be improved. After the initial startup, we invested time into

understanding how our personal values aligned as a group. This led us to a collective understanding

that now more than ever, empathy, equity, and compassion need to be the focus of any systemic

change. For most of our group, mental health challenges were personal, and for some, we had seen

firsthand how much room for growth our University's services had. Over time, we developed a plan,

assigned roles, and tasks, committed ourselves to follow the "DMAIC" [1] methodology often used in

Lean Six Sigma, and began our work. At the outset we had the following two goals:

1. Decrease the student to mental health staff member ratio by [at least] 35% over the next
   four years.
2. Explore adding a satellite mental health services office in either the Graduate College of
   Social Work or The Sugarland Campus' Main Building to house any increased staff.

One of our first realizations for this project was that it would require funding. Initially, we

attempted to model Texas Christian University, which recently developed what they called a

"Comprehensive Collaborative Care Model" which partners with local treatment centers to host

advanced care for their high-risk students. TCU's model has yet to cost the University money,

mainly due to the receival of grants from the Department of Health & Human Services. (Wood,

Eating Disorder Hope). Unfortunately, the University of Houston does not have a centralized

process in place to outsource or refer its students. Because of this, as well as the time constraints for

---

[1] "DMAIC" stands for Define, Measure, Analyze, Implement, and Control. This methodology is often used in
Corporations as a backbone to process improvement efforts.

this project, we turned to what we knew would be the fastest and easiest way to get funding, that of increasing the cost for the student.

The thought of increasing a tuition bill, especially as students, was not an undertaking we took lightly. We wanted to make sure that before any major changes were proposed we took the voices of our fellow students into consideration. Therefore, we wrote and distributed a 10 – Question Survey to over 115 students. After leaving the survey open for three weeks, we examined the results and were quite surprised by what we found. The first thing we noticed was that those identifying as women comprised over 60% of total respondents. The data also showed a 10% increase in the use of Mental Health Services amongst women in comparison to men. However, across racial lines, it was interesting to note that the percentage use of University Mental Health Services across White and Non-White participants was the same, that of 20%, even though only 40% of participants were White. Finally, we saw a 5% increase in utilization per year across the student tenure-line, starting at roughly 7% for Freshman and steadily increasing to about 27% for Seniors.

Across all respondents [however], only 25% of individuals had used University Mental Health Services and of those who had, only 60% gave a rating of "Good" or better. Yet, for those who had not, when asked "Why?" they stated various answers related to a lack of trust, confusion about cost and services, where to even get started, or that they had their own Mental Health Providers outside of the University.
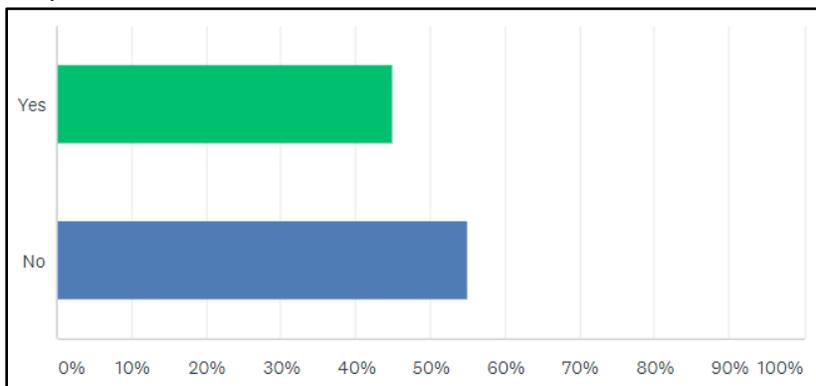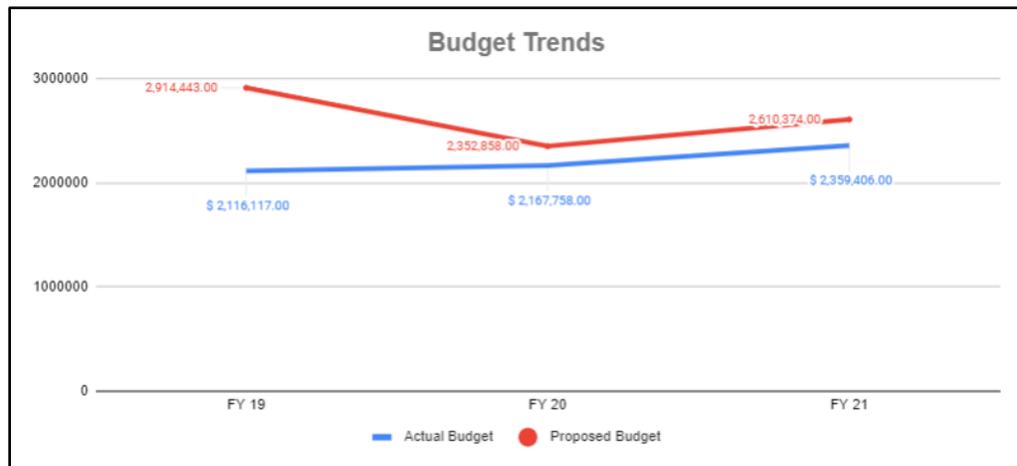

Graphic #1

Now, the most important question for this project was whether students would be willing to pay for more in tuition, for better access/quality to Mental Health Services. Not surprisingly, just over half, 55% of students said "No" as shown in *Graphic #1*. Most chose to decline simply because they did not want to pay for just another thing they would not use. Yet, when asked again to specify an amount that would be considered "acceptable" if tuition had to be raised, over 75% of students said that an amount "less than $250 dollars" per semester would be okay.

The group would be remiss if we did not also include a profound response we received in our survey. Keeping with our theme of empathy and equity, this individual wrote: "If colleges are unable to increase the quality of [their] mental health services without increasing tuition, colleges should look into ways to decrease the need for mental health services by caring more about the mental health of students in the first place."

Moving into the next phase for our project we began to analyze and review the University of Houston's Budgetary Information. After discussing the high-level processes with members of the CAPS [2] and the Budget Office we found that the University Centers funded with the money received from student fees go
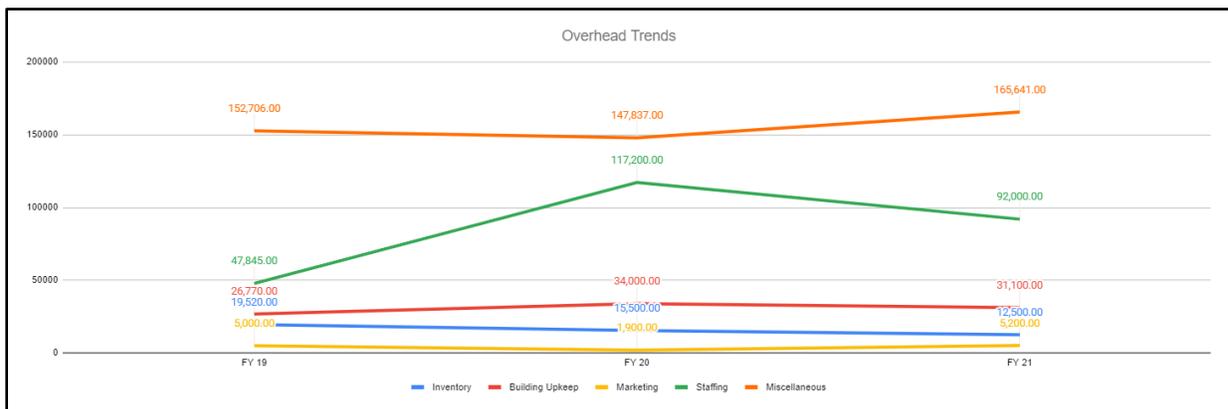

Graphic #2

through a rigorous period of budget reconciliation. It was at this point that we learned that any

---

[2] "CAPS" is the shorthand for the Counseling and Psychological Services center at the University. From this point forward we will refer to this center in shorthand, for clarity.

funding for our efforts would have to pass through the Student Fee Allocation Committee, who would then present any changes for approval to the University and State. With that in mind, we began investigating the CAPS Office's budget starting with the 2019 Fiscal Year. The Proposed Budgets for the 2019, 2020, and 2021 Fiscal year were as follows: $2,914,443; $2,352,858; $2,625,874; respectively. For more information, please refer to *Graphic #2* which highlights the differences between what is proposed versus what the Board of Regents accepts.

After reviewing the three fiscal year budgets, what stood out the most were the Advertising, Building Upkeep – Telecom, and Staffing trends. Regarding Advertising, we noticed that CAPS did not begin to spend money in this area until 2020 and beyond. Also, following 2020, the "Building Upkeep" portion of the Budget, specifically "Telecom Services" goes down, which makes sense given that the school plans to move back to in-person learning. However, the sharpest fluctuation we found was in Staffing, with a dramatic increase of a little over double from 2019's Fiscal Year to 2020's. For more information, please refer to *Graphic #3*.

Graphic #3

In Sum, *Graphic #4* showcases a breakdown between the income and expenses for the three above-mentioned fiscal years. Also, the total percentage of each section is featured as a percentage, broken across the areas of Salary, Benefits, and Overhead. What we found was that roughly 67% of

the CAPS Budget is allocated towards Salaries, with an additional 22% for Benefits. Meanwhile, approximately 11% of their budget is allocated for Overhead expenses.

It is with the abovementioned information in mind that we move into our 4 – Year Plan to improve our University's CAPS capabilities. To get started we offer the following contextual information as a baseline. The University

Budget Trends		
FY 19		
Total Income:	$	2,914,443.00
Total Salaries and Wages:		2,013,921.00
Fringe Benefits:		648,681.00
Total Overhead Expenses:		251,841.00
Total Expenses:		2,914,443.00
FY 20		
Total Income:	$	2,352,858.00
Total Salaries and Wages:		1,508,460.00
Fringe Benefits:		527,961.00
Total Overhead Expenses:		316,437.00
Total Expenses:		2,352,858.00
FY 21		
Total Income:	$	2,625,874.00
Total Salaries and Wages:		1,758,537.00
Fringe Benefits:		560,896.00
Total Overhead Expenses:		290,941.00
Total Expenses:		2,610,374.00
Total Percentage of Salaries		**67.04%**
Total Percentage of Benefits		**22.06%**
Total Percentage of Overhead		**10.91%**

Graphic #4

of Houston's total Student Population is that of 47,090 students. Currently, the CAPS Office has 20 Clinicians and 4 Administrators, alongside an additional 4 Doctoral Interns and 2 Practicum Trainees. For State Accreditation, however, the 6 Non-Certified staff members of the CAPS office cannot be included in the ratio to follow. Currently, the ratio of Mental Health Staff to Students is 1:2,355. [3] The average salary for a Clinician is $60,000, whereas the average salary for an Administrator is $90,000.

We propose that over the next 4 years, the following would occur: 18 additional Clinicians and 2 Additional Administrators would join the University, helping to reduce the ratio by over 45%, to that of 1:1,239. Please note that the University has an unofficial capacity rule in place suggesting that for every 10 Clinicians there should be 1 Administrator. These hires would cost the University a total of $2,820,000. This additional cost would impact the student by increasing the student fee

---

[3] Please note, the recommended ratio for Mental Health Staff to Students, according to multiple sources, is closer to 1:250 or 1:500.

Year	Student Body	# of Staff	# of Admins	Function	Reduction in Ratio by Year	Total Salary Cost	Cost Per Student	Increase Per Year
2021	47,090	20	4	2355		$1,560,000.00	$33.13	
2022	47,090	24	4	1962	20.00%	$1,800,000.00	$38.22	$5.10
2023	47,090	28	5	1682	16.67%	$2,130,000.00	$45.23	$7.01
2024	47,090	32	5	1472	14.29%	$2,370,000.00	$50.33	$5.10
2025	47,090	38	6	1239	18.75%	$2,820,000.00	$59.89	$9.56
Totals:	47,090	38	6	1239	-47.38%	$2,820,000.00		$26.76
	The student body is projected to remain within 10% +/- of current total, for these projections.							
	The goal is for the university to reduce student incurred cost by 10%.							

Graphic #5

portion of their tuition by roughly $25 total by the end of the 4 – Year plan. For a more complete breakdown of our plan, including the financial and ratio data per year, please refer to *Graphic #5*.

To conclude, we would like to point out a few aspects of our research that failed to make an appearance thus far. Due to time constraints for this project, in combination with a lack of sufficient correspondence by others, we were unable to identify potential sources for subsidization of Mental Health Services to private firms in the Houston area. However, it is the group's firm belief that if a concerted effort were made by the CAPS office to centralize their referral processes, lower rates could be obtained by firms looking to serve. This belief is rooted in the knowledge that with this new Governmental Administration, increased funding has been allocated for this exact purpose. Also, as stated in Goal #2, a part of our research was to identify if the College of Social Work or Sugar Land Campus would be capable of housing additional staff. Unfortunately, due to ongoing construction and limited space, neither facility would be able to accommodate additional staff now.

Lastly, it would be our hope that if this project were ever presented to the University, an attempt should be made to reduce the total cost of this plan by at least 10% or a minimum of $282,000. Both at the State and Federal level there are numerous grants and tax credits to be found for these exact purposes. As we discussed at the outset, college should be a time in our lives where we are worry-free. It is imperative for the health and success of future generations that we do something to address this mental health crisis, we believe that a plan like this is just the first step.

Work Cited:

Ekern, Baxter, and Eric Wood. "College Mental Health and Rethinking the Traditional Model."

Eating Disorder Hope, 31 July 2019, www.eatingdisorderhope.com/blog/college-mental-

health-rethinking-traditional-model.

Hackman, J. Richard. *Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performances*. Harvard Business School

Press, 2006.

Keierleber, Mark. "Most Students Have Experienced Mental Health Challenges During Pandemic,

Survey Reveals. But There Are Reasons for Optimism." *Yahoo! Money*, Yahoo!, 21 Mar. 2021,

money.yahoo.com/most-students-experienced-mental-health-110100445.html.

Wintersmith, Saraya. "College Students Face Increased Stress During Pandemic, Report Shows."

News, GBH, 13 July 2020, www.wgbh.org/news/education/2020/07/13/college-students-

face-increased-stress-during-pandemic-report-shows.

Team Dynamics:

When the semester began some three months ago, our group was comprised of relative strangers. Now, as we enter the final weeks of class, our group has come quite a way in terms of our relative knowledge of University Mental Health Initiatives, as well as our understanding of leading teams. As per the book "Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performances" by J. Richard Hackman we exist in what we believe to be a "self-governing team" (52, Hackman). It could be said that this team is actually "self-managed" or "self-designing" because our Professor organized the team members; however, it us our understanding that since we had complete [control] over direction, execution, and management duties (e.g., governance) we meet the qualifications for the highest levels of team autonomy.

That said, over the next few pages we will document our experiences this semester working on our group project, our methodologies, an interesting experience with a team member (or lack thereof) and share brief personal anecdotes about our time(s) together.

Our first group meeting went about as well as you could expect. It is the opinion of the group that the first few weeks were marked by uncertainty, both about the project's direction and the group members. Yet, over time we fell into a groove that worked for us. This was due to our explicit setting of group norms, via a Project Charter and Code of Conduct. Early on it was decided that our project was going to be on University Mental Health Services and tasks/titles were delegated by the Group Leader. Once these expectations became clear it allowed the group to enjoy more autonomy related to their tasks, with the understanding that all is well so long as we are making progress. Said progress was tracked and managed via a Gantt Chart Software, named Smartsheet. Alongside this tracking mechanism, we also adopted the DMAIC Methodology, borrowed from Lean Six Sigma to provide more direction to such a large topic.

A few weeks into our project journey, it became apparent that one member of our group was not contributing to the preset standards lined out in our Charter. ██████████████, who was originally given the title of "Director of Finance", whose main responsibilities included managing and directing the financial data gathered for the project, stopped showing up to our team meetings altogether. Not only did [they] stop attending our meetings, but numerous attempts also to make contact were met with silence. This altered our group dynamic in the following ways:

1. Our group was still quite young, overall trust for each other had not yet grown to its full maturity. The clear disregard for responsibility, as well as the disrespect for the group's time, added stress to the members who picked up for ███████ slack (named ███).

2. Per or Code of Conduct, were any issues to arise with a Team Members performance, it was to be handled internally first. A performance conversation was to be had with the member led by the Team Leader, (unless it were the Team Leader with whom the issue was had, which then another member would facilitate). However, considering we could not even get into contact with ███████, the group felt anxious about how to proceed. Eventually, it was decided that the Professor be notified and to our knowledge, the matter has yet to be handled.

   a. Therefore, you do not see ████████████████ name listed on this project. The group decided unanimously that [they were] not worthy of receiving credit for work [they] did not assist in completing.

Throughout the early stages of our project, namely the Analyze phase, the group experienced some difficulty with grasping real results and progress. Our collective problem existed in two forms:

1. It is difficult to measure progress on a project with no strict deadlines (outside of an "end date") and one based on theoretical application.

2. The majority of what we were doing was waiting on others to provide information, access, or answers to questions we did not have the ability to understand alone.

These two sets of challenges put the group in an interesting situation as a team. For those members, whose direct responsibilities were more tangible, it could have easily been seen by them as that other members were not working as hard or doing as much. However, it was at this point both in our team and in class that we learned about the second style of coaching [mentioned in "Leading Teams]. According to J. Richard Hackman, it is at or around the midpoint of a team's life cycle that reflection becomes extremely important (180, Hackman). With that knowledge in mind, we put forth a concerted effort to keep morale high and offer opportunities for frustrations to be aired. This worked well in addition to our monthly happy hours, where we not only developed inter-group trust but also casual camaraderie.

Regarding the Group Leader, the following information was given *from* the Team *to* the Group Leader (who from here forward will be referred to by his name, Tristan). Tristan's expectations for the group early on were [quite high and] not received well, given that the group had not yet had time to fully develop. His leadership style provided the team with organization and structure, although Tristan could have done more to mitigate the spread of responsibility and stress upon the exit of ██████ from the group. Overall, Tristan's efforts were appreciated and his idea to include non-productive interactions for the group outside of project work helped the team grow closer.

In sum, we as a group experienced a well-designed course, where our skillsets and the desired tasks to be completed were just far apart enough that our perceived rate of exertion was not too great. These conditions provided by the Professor allowed us to grow in our understanding of

Teamwork & Leadership. Although we experienced many setbacks, the group believes that this project (namely our 30-Minute Presentation) was well worth the effort put forth on the back end.

We conclude this portion of our project report with the following anecdotes and personal summaries:

- **Tristan A. Locks –**
  - *"This group was a pleasure to be a part of and an honor to lead."*

- ██████████████ –
  - *"I've never been in a group that actually got [things] done. Besides Andrew leaving the group, we didn't have any issues!"*

- ███████████ –
  - *"Working with this group has been a joy. I've been a part of groups that were productive before, but this is the first time I've had a group that really got to know one another."*

- ██████████████ –
  - *"The software we used really helped us stay organized and meet our deadlines. The group was definitely a success!"*

- ██████████████ –
  - *"I'd always hated the idea of group projects, but I really feel like we got to know each other well and learned how to communicate in a productive way. Who knew group projects didn't have to be a hassle…"*

Team Assessments:

The information contained below was gathered at the beginning of the semester, most of it contained in our Project Charter. For our Team Assessments, we decided to utilize the following tools: Meyers Briggs *(courtesy of 16 Personalities),* Strength Finders, and the DISC Profile. Throughout the Project lifecycle, this information has helped us by providing a better understanding of ourselves, alongside giving our teammates more insight into our natural communication styles, personality, and strong points.

- **Tristan Locks:**

  - *Meyers Briggs –* ESTJ

  - *Strengths –* Strategist, Empathizer, Coach, Storyteller, Deliverer
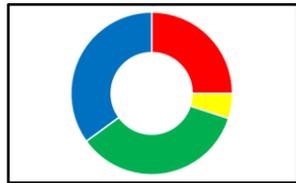
  - *DISC Profile:* Dominant C

    -

- **██████████:**
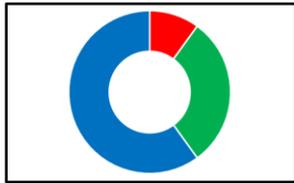
  - *Meyers Briggs –* ISFJ

  - *Strengths –* Analyst, Chameleon, Thinker, Timekeeper, Strategist
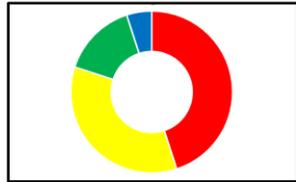
  - *DISC Profile:* Dominant D

    -

- ████████:

  - *Meyers Briggs* – INFP

  - *Strengths* – Coach, Problem Solver, Storyteller, Empathizer, Thinker

  - *DISC Profile:* Dominant C & S

    -

- ████████:

  - *Meyers Briggs* – ESFP

  - *Strengths* – Adapt, Analyze, Empathetic, Communication, Believer

  - *DISC Profile:* Dominant D & I

    -

- ████████████:

  - *Meyers Briggs* – INFP

  - *Strengths* – Empathizer, Chameleon, Coach, Peacekeeper, Thinker

  - *DISC Profile:* Dominant I

    -