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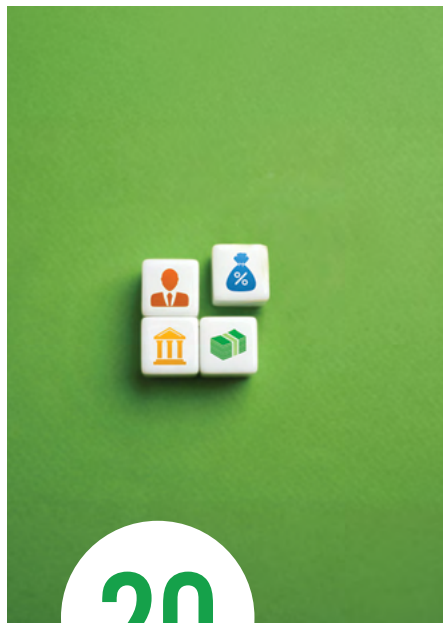
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CONTENTS

September 2025



20

Beyond Tuition Dollars

Colleges are learning new ways to generate revenue.



22

Who Gets to Protest?

Free speech and campus policy gets updated in 2025.



30

Higher-Ed Governance Under Pressure

Political shifts are reshaping campus governance, autonomy, and efforts to promote inclusion.



26

Building Global Partnerships

U.S. universities forge international ties amid domestic turmoil.

10

Revolutionizing Alzheimer's Care

Indiana University's new blood test receives FDA approval.

12

LBG Students Face Attrition Risks

Medical school attrition linked to identity, not just academics.

14

Same-Sex Policy Tactics

How colleges manage values amid political tension.

16

Op-Ed: Constructive Collaboration

New programs strengthen connections between universities and the communities they serve.

18

AI Use Reducing Faculty Burnout

Study finds daily AI use can alleviate instructional burdens.

In Each Issue

New Directions **8**

Closing Insight **68**



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SPECIAL REPORT

Mental Health & Wellness



36

Digital Care Revolution

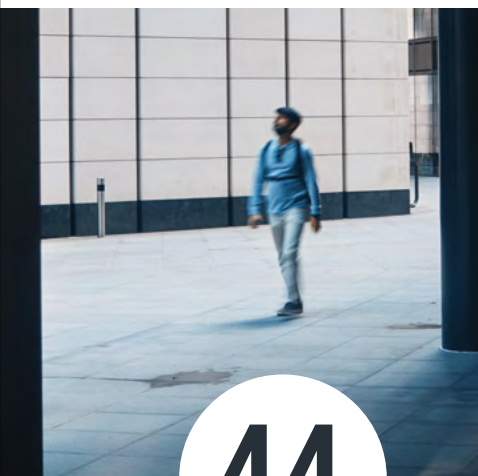
AI, apps, and data reshape mental health in higher ed.



40

New Curriculum Approaches

Trends show a shift from “tough it out” to “you’re not alone.”



44

Campus Loneliness Crisis

Why students are still struggling to connect after the pandemic.

COVER STORY



57

2025 Insight Into Academia Mental Health and Well-Being Award

Honoring colleges and universities that support mental health and wellness across campus.

34

Maternal Wellness

Interdisciplinary summit tackles care gaps for mothers.

46

Evolving Campus Well-Being

New campus wellness strategies for a broader impact.

48

Mental Health First Aid

Proactive training helps campuses handle mental health crises.

50

Neurodivergent Inclusion on Campus

How colleges are building true belonging beyond accommodations.

52

JED Campus Grows

Innovative JED program bolsters campus well-being strategies.

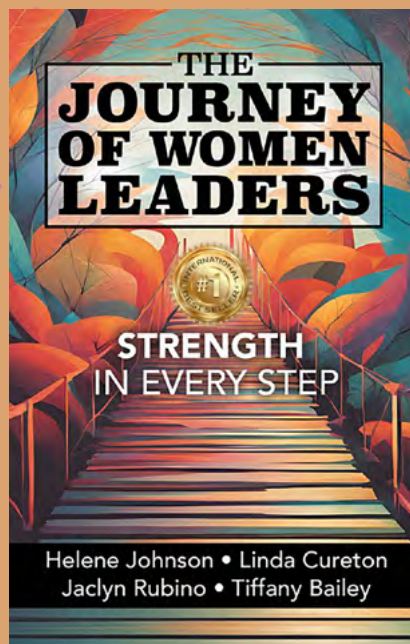
54

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IU Research Helps Bring Easier Alzheimer's Testing to More Patients

By Erik Cliburn

A major advancement in

Alzheimer's disease diagnosis is now available to the public, thanks to a decade-long research effort led in part by Indiana University (IU) School of Medicine. A new blood test—the first of its kind to detect Alzheimer's-related brain changes with high accuracy—received clearance from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in May, offering a more accessible and less invasive alternative to traditional diagnostic methods.

Developed through collaboration between IU and leading research institutions—including the Mayo Clinic, Lund University, the University of San Francisco, and Columbia University—the test measures the ratio of two specific blood biomarkers: phosphorylated tau (pTau217) and beta-amyloid 1-42. These proteins are closely linked to the presence of amyloid plaques in the brain, a hallmark of Alzheimer's disease. Studies found the test to be over 90% accurate, comparable to PET brain scans or cerebrospinal fluid analysis—the current gold standards in diagnosis.

“Now everybody can benefit from a more definitive diagnosis,” Jeff Dage, PhD, senior research professor of neurology at the IU School of Medicine and one of the lead scientists behind the test, told *The Herald-Times*. “Early detection means more rapid diagnosis and faster time to treatment.”

Until now, diagnosing Alzheimer's has required costly and often inaccessible procedures like PET scans or lumbar punctures—tests not readily available to many patients, especially those in rural areas or without specialized insurance coverage.

The new test, now available to adults aged 55 and older who are

experiencing cognitive symptoms, can be ordered by physicians. By opening up diagnostic options, it could enable earlier intervention through therapies, participation in clinical trials, or lifestyle changes aimed at slowing cognitive decline.

While the FDA approval is significant, Dage emphasizes that the work is far from over. The current version of the test is intended for use in patients already showing signs of dementia, not for broad screening of asymptomatic individuals. “A false positive could be really traumatic; that's why the FDA says it's to be used by

they are the true heroes of this story.”

The research is part of a broader effort at the IU School of Medicine to lead Alzheimer's disease innovation. Dage's work has supported several major initiatives, including the Indiana Alzheimer's Disease Research Center and the National Centralized Repository for Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias.

Bruce Lamb, PhD, executive director of the Stark Neurosciences Research Institute at IU, says the test is a prime example of how biomarker research connects basic science and real-world treatment.

“Above all, I'm grateful to the patients and families who have participated in our research—they are the true heroes of this story.”

Jeff Dage, PhD, senior research professor of neurology, IU School of Medicine

people being seen by an expert,” Dage said. “For me, it's about longitudinal testing and keeping track of how you change over time, because false positives don't typically repeat.”

Dage's interest in developing a blood-based biomarker is personal. After experiencing the lengthy and often ambiguous diagnostic process for his mother, who died from complications of dementia in 2019, he committed to making Alzheimer's testing more accessible.

“While the test is a major milestone, we must continue to refine it, expand its use and ensure it reaches those who need it most,” he said. “Above all, I'm grateful to the patients and families who have participated in our research—

“This program has allowed us to identify and validate biomarkers of disease in animal models, identify unique biomarkers linked to therapeutic targets, characterize novel fluid biomarkers in patient populations and clinical trials, and implement biomarkers in the community,” Lamb said in a press release.

Dage's lab is currently recruiting both cognitively healthy individuals and those with memory concerns to help further research and refine future testing.

With FDA clearance now in hand and broader availability on the horizon, researchers hope the test marks the beginning of a new era in how Alzheimer's disease is detected and managed. ●

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LGB Medical Students Face Higher Attrition Rates, New Study Finds

By Erik Cliburn

A newly published study from researchers at Yale University and New York University reveals that medical students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) are significantly more likely to drop out of medical school than their heterosexual peers. The findings raise concerns about persistent inequities in medical education and the challenges facing students with marginalized identities.

The study, published in *JAMA Network Open*, analyzed data from 45,296 students who matriculated at U.S. medical schools between 2014 and 2017. Researchers found that 2.5% of all students left medical school during that time, but LGB students faced notably higher rates of attrition. Bisexual students experienced the highest rate—4.2%—with an adjusted odds ratio (AOR) of 1.99 compared to non-LGB peers. Gay and lesbian students had a 3.7% attrition rate (AOR of 1.47) versus 2.4% among those who were non-LGB.

Although the specific reasoning for the attrition is undetermined in the study, the researchers cite other works that suggest discrimination may play a role.

“The findings highlight the importance of intersectionality in understanding attrition from medical school,” the authors wrote. “Although future studies need to examine the cause of these disparities in attrition, LGB students experience discrimination within medical training environments, which may lead to risk of attrition.”

These disparities extended across racial and ethnic lines as well. Black and Hispanic students each had attrition rates of 4.7%, significantly higher than the 2.0% rate for white



New York University plaza in New York City

students. Adjusted odds ratios for Black and Hispanic students were 1.42 and 1.53, respectively.

The analysis also uncovered stark differences when identities intersect. Among the most vulnerable were LGB Hispanic students—both male and female—with the highest risk of dropping out. LGB Hispanic female students had an AOR of 3.52, and males had an AOR of 3.11, compared to an AOR of 1 among non-LGB white males. In contrast, non-LGB Asian, Black, and Hispanic males also had elevated odds of attrition, as did LGB white females.

Researchers used multivariable logistic regression to control for factors such as age, MCAT scores, and undergraduate GPA, ensuring that disparities were not simply the result of academic differences.

The study posits that cultural and social factors may play a significant role in the higher dropout rates among Hispanic LGB students in particular. The authors noted that “members of both the LGB and Hispanic communities may encounter

less supportive attitudes toward homosexuality,” particularly among recent immigrants or within traditional family structures. “Trends in medical education have not explicitly included Hispanic-specific discrimination issues, inadvertently reducing social support for Hispanic students,” they added.

While the research offers crucial data on attrition, it also acknowledges limitations. Sexual orientation data was self-reported, and the study could not assess outcomes for students with other marginalized identities, such as transgender or pansexual. Furthermore, attrition was more common among those who did not respond to the survey, suggesting disengagement itself may be a risk factor.

As calls to diversify the physician workforce continue, the findings underscore the need for more inclusive, culturally responsive support systems in medical education. Without addressing the unique challenges faced by LGB and racial minority students, the medical profession may continue to lose talented individuals who could serve increasingly diverse patient populations. ●

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Same Sex Benefits Can Survive

Even in Red States

By Erik Cliburn

In the face of political opposition

and cultural pushback, many public universities in the U.S. still managed to expand rights for LGBTQIA+ employees in the late 20th and early 21st centuries—by choosing their words carefully.

A new study from the University of Washington, co-authored by Chad Murphy, PhD of Oregon State University and Forrest Briscoe, PhD of Cornell University, reveals how institutions in conservative states adopted same-sex domestic partner benefits, not by leading with social justice rhetoric, but by strategically framing the policies around values their stakeholders already supported—such as economic competitiveness and employee retention.

Published in *Organization Science*, the research offers timely insights into how institutions can pursue inclusion goals even in politically fraught environments. The findings are particularly relevant today as universities face renewed scrutiny over DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) initiatives and academic freedom.

The study focused on more than two decades of data from top U.S. public universities, revealing that institutions in conservative states were more likely to justify the adoption of same-sex partner benefits through market-based arguments—rather than moral or civil rights appeals. According to the findings, these universities often emulated major local employers that had already adopted similar policies, effectively using the private sector as a shield against political backlash.

“When universities face powerful

stakeholders who oppose their values, how they frame their decisions can be as important as the decisions themselves,” said Abhinav Gupta, co-author of the study and professor of management at the University of Washington Foster School of Business.

Gupta explained that the research began with an interest in how institutional change unfolds under ideological pressure, particularly within

Institutions in conservative states were more likely to justify the adoption of same-sex partner benefits through market-based arguments.

the context of LGBTQIA+ rights—a movement that had made significant gains in shifting both cultural attitudes and workplace practices.

“We weren’t just curious about whether universities adopted these benefits—we wanted to understand how they managed the politics of those decisions, especially in states where conservative legislatures controlled university budgets,” he said.

One of the study’s key takeaways is that universities in red states were significantly more cautious and delayed adoption of same-sex partner benefits. However, when they did act,

they often explained their decisions by referencing business imperatives or the example of respected corporations in their regions. “This allowed them to present the decision as a practical response to labor market trends rather than an ideologically-driven move,” Gupta noted.

By contrast, universities in more progressive states tended to be early adopters and framed their policies around values like fairness and inclusion. These institutions were more likely to cite peer universities as inspiration rather than corporate examples.

The researchers argue that these strategic adaptations are not relics of the past but remain highly relevant today. As colleges and universities face mounting scrutiny over DEI policies, they may benefit from understanding the importance of communications that reverberate across political divides.

“This doesn’t mean compromising principles,” Gupta said. “It means understanding the value systems of key stakeholders and learning to speak in ways that resonate.”

The research underscores the importance of what the authors call “exemplar organizations”—entities already seen as “legitimate” by skeptical audiences. Referencing these exemplars can help institutions minimize resistance and present progressive changes as pragmatic rather than partisan.

The study ultimately suggests that organizational change is often not just a matter of policy but of strategy. And in a polarized climate, the language universities use to describe their choices may be just as important as the choices themselves. ●

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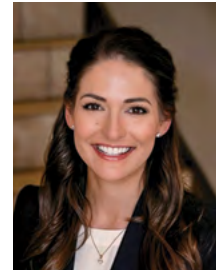


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College Community Offers a New Way Forward for the 'Town And Gown' Relationship

By Philip Oldham and Amy New



The connection between universities and the communities they inhabit is a perennial topic of research and conversation—even earning the colloquial name “town and gown” relationships.

For some campuses, these relationships can be fraught. A May 2020 *Forbes* article compared this association to “a marriage relationship without exchanging vows.” Likewise, a prominent university president warned years earlier that “longstanding suspicions on both sides of the [college and community] relationship impede constructive collaboration.”

It doesn't have to be this way.

At Tennessee Tech University in Cookeville, Tenn., our campus and community have made a conscious decision to lean in, lock arms and support each other's continued success. We know that our futures are closely intertwined, and we are stronger as a team.

This collaboration is not new. For example, Tennessee Tech's School of Music has partnered with a community nonprofit organization to support a thriving professional symphony in Cookeville – the Bryan Symphony Orchestra – for more than 60 years; an offering unheard of in most communities our size.

But in recent years, our university and city have deepened this partnership in ways we believe can be a model to others. Starting in 2023, the city and campus have come together each fall for “College Town Kickoff,” an all-day block party in Cookeville's vibrant downtown complete with street vendors, a zipline, Ferris wheel, live music, and more.

Businesses in the historic WestSide district have also joined forces with the university for “Wings Up Wednesdays on the WestSide.” Tennessee Tech provides a

free shuttle service for students each Wednesday evening, taking them to the town's cultural epicenter, where they are greeted with special dining and shopping discounts. Students enjoy the cheap eats while businesses benefit from the influx of foot traffic.

Also this year, the university partnered with the city on gateway monument signs welcoming visitors as they arrive from the interstate. The large brick and concrete signs are inscribed with the city seal and university logo, along with the words “Cookeville: Home of Tennessee Tech University”—sending an unmistakable signal of our campus-community bond.

The university has even trademarked the phrase “Tennessee's College Town” to showcase its pride in being part of a community that embraces students. It also produces a podcast with Cookeville's visitors bureau titled “College Town Talk,” in which alumni, local civic leaders, merchants and restaurateurs stop by to reminisce about the impact of the university in their own lives and to take advantage of exposure to Tennessee Tech students, parents, faculty and staff who make up the listening audience.

The reasons for this symbiotic relationship between the campus and community are twofold. First, we see it as simply being a good neighbor. Second, now is no time for colleges or their surrounding communities to go it alone. Each entity faces challenges the other can help solve.

Food service and hospitality businesses that are the lifeblood of our

communities are having “a more difficult time retaining workers,” according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, but college students provide a built-in workforce.

Universities are contending with talk of a future “enrollment cliff” that has resulted in greater competition for student recruitment. A thriving local community with attractive off-campus destinations can help a college stand out from the crowd.

U.S. consumer spending fell earlier this year, a trend that acutely impacts small businesses in cities like ours, but the university offers a pool of would-be shoppers right in our backyard.

Here in Cookeville, all signs point to our partnership being a success. Tennessee Tech kicked off the fall 2024 semester with its highest total enrollment in nearly a decade and the fourth-largest freshman class in its history.

At the community level, our county's labor force grew by more than 10 percent from 2020 to 2024, according to the Cookeville-Putnam County Chamber of Commerce, and the median household income rose by nearly \$10,000—leading the U.S. Census Bureau to declare Cookeville a top-ten micropolitan area for numeric growth.

Our advice to universities and communities navigating today's uncertain economic terrain? Team up and share the load together. We're glad we did. ●

Dr. Philip Oldham is the president of Tennessee Tech University. Amy New is the president and CEO of the Cookeville-Putnam County Chamber of Commerce and a Tennessee Tech University alumna.

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AI USE MAY EASE FACULTY BURNOUT

By Kat Castagnoli

The demands on college and university faculty have never been higher. From mounting administrative duties to increasing student needs and expectations, educators across the country are stretched thin. Add in the growing complexity of digital teaching environments—and the uncertainty of AI integration—and it's no wonder burnout is at an all-time high.

But new data suggests a glimmer of relief might be hiding in plain sight.

A first-of-its-kind survey from Tyton Partners, in collaboration with global learning technology leader D2L, reveals a clear connection between daily AI use and reduced faculty workload. According to their Time for Class 2025 report, faculty who use generative AI tools every day are far more likely to report a decrease in the time they spend on routine tasks—allowing them to refocus on what they do best: teaching, mentoring, and supporting student success.

“Thirty-six percent of instructors who use AI daily reported a marked decrease in their workload,” said Catherine Shaw, managing director at Tyton Partners. “That’s not a small shift—it’s a meaningful change in how faculty can engage with their time, especially as administrative demands continue to climb.”

Faculty using AI tools like D2L Lumi are reporting streamlined processes in grading, content creation, and student feedback—areas traditionally bogged down by time-intensive tasks. Lumi, embedded directly into D2L’s Brightspace platform, provides instant quiz comments, automated grades, and personalized practice questions, helping instructors focus more on student interaction and less on back-end logistics.

Dr. Cristi Ford, chief learning officer at D2L, sees this as a pivotal shift. “With the right AI tools in place, faculty can save more valuable time on specific tasks, creating more bandwidth to engage with students one-on-one,” she explained. “AI, when done right, enhances—not replaces—the learning experience.”

Some institutions are already modeling what that “right” approach can look like.

At the California State University System, over 460,000 students and 63,000 faculty and staff now have

access to ChatGPT Edu, thanks to a systemwide rollout prioritizing AI literacy and ethical application. Rather than leaving faculty to navigate AI adoption solo, CSU is creating structured, supported integration across all 23 campuses—blending innovation with responsibility.

At the University of Texas at Austin, the course “The Essentials of AI for Life and Society” equips not just students but faculty and staff with a foundational understanding of AI’s technical and ethical implications.



WAYS FACULTY ARE USING AI TO LIGHTEN WORKLOAD

AUTOMATED GRADING AND FEEDBACK

AI tools like D2L Lumi provide instant quiz scoring, feedback, and gradebook integration—freeing up hours normally spent grading and allowing instructors to focus on higher-impact interactions.

EARLY ALERT AND INTERVENTION

By flagging students at risk of falling behind based on Learning Management System (LMS) behavior patterns or performance data, AI can help faculty intervene earlier—without needing to comb through every data point.

CONTENT CREATION SUPPORT

Using generative AI to draft quiz questions, discussion prompts, lecture outlines, and even assignment rubrics—cutting down prep time without compromising quality.

ACADEMIC ADVISING ASSISTANCE

Some instructors report using AI to help automate appointment scheduling, track advising notes, and provide preliminary academic guidance.

PERSONALIZED STUDENT RECOMMENDATIONS

AI-enabled platforms can analyze student performance and recommend tailored study materials or practice questions, reducing the need for individualized remediation.

Offered as a 14-week seminar open to the entire campus community, the course pairs practical skills with conversations on misinformation, privacy, bias, and equity. Early surveys show a measurable boost in campus-wide AI literacy and confidence.

Still, not all faculty have the same support. The Time for Class report reveals that 39% saw no change in workload, and 26% reported an increase—often due to the burden of monitoring student AI use. And with only 28% of institutions having formal generative AI policies, many instructors remain stuck in the gray zone between innovation and enforcement.

“There’s strong alignment around the importance of preparing students to use AI,” Shaw noted. “But institutions need clearer strategies and tools to do so effectively.”

That disconnect is evident in perception gaps: while 84% of students say they turn to people—faculty or peers—when struggling in a course, nearly one-third of instructors believe students are more likely to turn to AI tools. This mismatch raises concerns around trust, transparency, and academic integrity.

Encouragingly, 75% of administrators and 58% of faculty agree that it’s their responsibility—or their institution’s—to ensure students know how to use AI effectively. “Ethical adoption is the next frontier,” Ford said. “We can’t afford to just deploy AI—we have to educate students, faculty, and staff on its best uses and boundaries. That’s where true impact happens.”

The takeaway? Institutions that embed AI into daily workflows—along with clear, sensible policies and support—are not just reducing faculty burnout: they’re reshaping what’s possible in the classroom. ●

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Beyond Tuition: New Ways Colleges Are Making Money

By Misty Evans



When tuition hikes stopped being the golden ticket, colleges turned dormant spaces into dollars and intellectual property into profit. Now, in an era of flat enrollments and rising costs, institutions are leaning into untapped assets—from real estate rentals to alumni platforms—to plug budget gaps and fuel innovation.

Picture Sweet Briar College, a small liberal arts school in Virginia that nearly shut down in 2015. Today, it draws income from literary retreats, hydroponic lettuce sales, and even horseback riding lessons. It recently hosted a \$950 per person writing retreat on campus.

Whittier College in California realized \$700,000 in 2023 from weddings, yoga retreats, and film shoots, up 40% from the year before. And the Rhode Island School of Design earned \$206,000 in 2024 by renting out gallery space, dorms, and a beachfront farm for high-end events.

These creative uses of campus property not only bring in unrestricted revenue but also serve as marketing tools for prospective students and community goodwill, according to a 2024 Wall Street Journal report on emerging campus monetization strategies.

Real Estate Revenue

Colleges and universities are increasingly partnering with private developers to monetize underused land and facilities. These public-private partnerships, or P3s, typically involve long-term leases for student housing, mixed-use retail centers, or even hotels built on campus-owned land.

According to a report by Plante Moran Cresa, a real estate advisory firm, schools are using P3s to “maximize the function of existing facilities” and reinvest proceeds into academic priorities. Institutions like the University of California and Arizona State University have used this model to expand housing without incurring public debt or raising tuition.

Non-Degree Programs Step Up

While traditional online degrees remain essential, many institutions are pivoting toward microcredentials, industry-recognized certifications, and stackable skills programs. These offerings, often created in partnership with employers or aligned with workforce needs, can yield higher margins than traditional degrees.

According to Encoura's August 2024 Wake-Up Call report, schools are seeing more substantial returns from targeted, short-form learning than from broad online degree expansion. "It's not just about scaling enrollment anymore," the report notes. "It's about smart program design, rapid iteration, and high-impact outcomes."

Commercializing Innovation

Universities have long been centers of discovery, but now, more are turning to patents, startups, and licensing as steady revenue streams. Schools like the University of Michigan and the University of Utah have created innovation districts and tech transfer offices that help faculty bring inventions to market.

Rainforest Innovations, the technology commercialization arm of the University of New Mexico, reported in 2023 that it had generated more than \$500 million in research funding and helped launch dozens of startup companies. According to its annual report, these ventures created hundreds

of jobs and delivered tens of millions in annual economic output for the state.

Alumni-Fueled Engines

Institutions are also rethinking alumni giving, not as a one-time ask but as a sustained engagement strategy. That means hosting affinity networks, creating alumni boards with real influence, and offering value-added services like job placement and lifelong learning.

According to a 2024 report by Ruffalo Noel Levitz, women now drive 85% of high-net-worth charitable decisions, yet comprise only 28% of university board members. Engaging underrepresented alumni groups through leadership pipelines and shared-governance roles has been shown to significantly increase giving and long-term loyalty.

Task Forces, Trust, and Transparency

Experts agree: one-off strategies aren't enough. Sustainable success depends on integrated planning across departments—finance, advancement, facilities, and academics.

Deloitte's 2025 U.S. Higher Education Trends report stresses that "revenue innovation must be balanced by trust-building across constituencies." Institutions that establish cross-functional teams to pilot, measure, and scale revenue projects are seeing better returns and

less resistance. These teams evaluate mission alignment, ROI, and long-term viability before launching new ventures.

Risk, Reputation, and Rising Costs

Of course, not every monetization strategy is risk-free. Real estate projects can burden schools with debt or zoning challenges. Online programs require significant upfront investment in technology and faculty training. And pushing alumni toward transactional models can backfire if relationships feel disingenuous.

Economist Howard Bowen's revenue theory of cost remains a cautionary tale: the more revenue a university earns, the more it tends to spend, often escalating fixed costs without solving core budget issues. Responsible growth, not expansion for its own sake, is key.

The Future

The era of tuition-driven growth is fading. In its place, universities are drawing on everything else they have—land, knowledge, networks, reputation—to build diversified, sustainable revenue streams.

Institutions that succeed will do so by remaining mission-aligned, involving key stakeholders, and investing in programs that offer both fiscal and social returns. Higher education isn't selling its soul, rather it's learning how to sell its spare conference room. ●

Campus Case Studies

Sweet Briar College has turned agricultural sales, high-end retreats, and equestrian programming into meaningful income.

Endicott College in Massachusetts generates more than \$2 million a year from weddings, summer camps, and a campus inn—enough to help offset tuition freezes and boost faculty salaries.

Vanderbilt University rents out student housing to summer interns from local hospitals and corporations, serving over 500 interns each year and creating a seasonal cash flow without academic disruption.



Who Gets to Protest?



A spike over the last two years in campus demonstrations around the Israel-Hamas conflict, racial justice, political divides, and free-speech debates has prompted U.S. universities to tighten protest policies. As students reclaim outdoor spaces, institutions are rewriting what protesting will look like in 2025 and beyond, including who gets to do it, and how.

Insight looked at how U.S. universities responded to the rise in campus protests by updating their policies on free speech, encampments, and student activism. For most institutions, there have been key policy changes—such as time, place, and manner restrictions, permit requirements, disciplinary actions, and new legislation.

Higher education leaders, student affairs professionals, legal scholars, faculty, and student organizers should find this information especially valuable for understanding the evolving boundaries of protest and free speech on college campuses.

Encampments and Structures: Mostly Banned

Many institutions firmly prohibit tents or overnight camping on school grounds.

The University of Utah states: “It is unlawful to set up structures or camp overnight on University of Utah property,” reinforcing that free speech does not include encampments, as reported by *The New York Post*.

On its website, **Princeton University** administration emphasizes that its “time, place, and manner” policy enforces a “clear and explicit prohibition upon encampments,” stating that “camping in vehicles, tents, or other structures is not permitted on campus.”

Dartmouth College, per its president’s communications after spring 2024’s pro-Gaza encampments, disciplined students who defied the bans.

Columbia University’s recently announced suspensions and expulsions for those blocking access and ignoring procedures after a May 2025 library takeover.

Time, Place and Manner Restrictions

Universities are setting narrow windows and specific zones for protest, often mirroring public-forum doctrines.

University of California Davis’ (UC Davis) Freedom of Expression Policy states that time, place, and manner regulations are “reasonable limitations,” enforced in open areas like the quad, with registered student organizations (RSOs) required to follow them.

The University of Virginia’s updated demonstration guidelines specify that “no outdoor events are permitted on grounds between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m.” and require that activities “do not restrict equal access.”

SUNY Empire State University’s policy affirms that while expression must be enabled, its “time, place,

and manner” cannot disrupt campus safety or operations.

Notification, Permits, and ID Checks

Advance notice requirements are increasingly common, along with ID checks.

Columbia’s conduct handbook instructs event organizers to notify Public Safety and University Life “no later than at the time of their public announcement,” and requires compliance with “time, place, and manner” limits, including sound.

Advocacy Concerns and Campus Tensions

Critics fear regulations are becoming overly restrictive.

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression argues some rules go “far beyond” constitutional limits by delegating vague enforcement to university officials, according to *The Houston Chronicle*.

Columbia faces criticism for investigating students over pro-Palestinian speech and op-eds; some argue it has morphed into a “speech-suppression” mechanism, as mentioned in a *Time* magazine article.

Why These Measures?

OPERATIONAL DISRUPTION:

Administrators report blocked walkways, sanitation concerns, and interference with academic functions. UC Davis highlighted health risks tied to encampments.

LEGAL COMPLIANCE:

Public universities leverage constitutional time, place, and manner doctrine, while private schools use conduct codes to address harassment and disruption.

SAFETY:

Concerns exist regarding harassment, escalation into violence, and weapons in states where firearms are permitted.

LEGISLATIVE PRESSURE:

Texas lawmakers introduced SB 2972 in 2025, which would forbid camping, mask-wearing during protests, and nighttime expressing on public campuses. Critics argue it could chill free speech; supporters say it ensures order.

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) issued a statement last summer, saying the new protest policies are “overly restrictive, undermine academic freedom, and violate the First Amendment.”

Balancing Voice and Order

Some schools pilot pre-emptive communication strategies.

According to their website, **UC Davis** implemented faculty-student engagement teams to discuss demands during the 2024 quad encampment.

Dartmouth expanded open-forum programming under its “Dartmouth Dialogues” initiative, aiming to foster discussion without protest escalation, as detailed by an article in *The New York Times*.

What's Next in 2025

Universities entering the next academic year face a critical juncture. The popularity of overnight encampments during peak protest seasons continues to test institutional resolve. As states weigh new laws like Texas SB 2972, known as the “Campus Protection Act,” which imposes significant restrictions on protest activities at public colleges and universities, and campus policies evolve, the debate over preserving protesters’ rights while maintaining academic order intensifies.

Will universities rely on bans and real-time surveillance? Or will more options like engagement, clear permitting rules, and robust communication prevail? Stay tuned. ●

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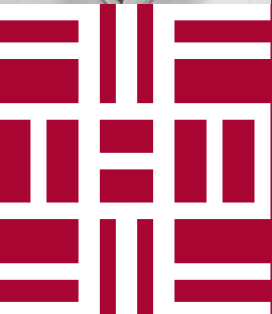
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Expanding Beyond Borders

U.S. Universities Look Abroad
Amid Domestic Pressures

By Erik Cliburn



As political volatility and funding uncertainties rattle the American higher education landscape, a growing number of U.S. colleges and universities are turning their gaze outward, forming international partnerships to bolster academic resilience, expand global opportunities, and insulate themselves from mounting domestic challenges.

These strategic moves range from transatlantic business degrees to joint engineering institutes in China, revealing a broad recalibration of institutional priorities. At the heart of this shift is a recognition that global collaboration offers not only reputational and research benefits, but also stability in an increasingly fractured domestic environment.

Seton Hall Bets on European Innovation

Seton Hall University recently became the first U.S. institution to join the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Digital, an initiative of the European Union that brings together leading universities, research centers, and companies to foster digital innovation and entrepreneurship. The New Jersey-based university is leveraging the partnership to launch joint programs and tap into Europe's innovation economy.

"This partnership aligns perfectly with our mission to develop entrepreneurial leaders and foster global collaboration," said Mary Kate Naatus, associate provost for Partnerships and Global Initiatives. "Seton Hall students will benefit from direct exposure to global innovators and institutions at the forefront of digital change."

Already in the works is a Global MBA program in partnership with a European university, along with new graduate offerings in data science and cybersecurity that align with EIT Digital's Knowledge and Innovation Communities. These programs will expand opportunities for interdisciplinary research and cross-border collaboration,

preparing students for careers in a globally integrated economy.

Seton Hall's location near New York City further positions it as a bridge between American business networks and European research ecosystems. The university is also participating in EIT Digital's Open Innovation Factory, which supports the creation of scalable ventures by connecting academic institutions with industry partners. Through this platform, they plan to contribute faculty expertise and student-led innovation to a broader

Yale Anchors Academic Ties in Athens

Yale University is strengthening its global footprint through a new dual master's program in environmental sciences and public health with the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA). The partnership, officially inaugurated during a visit by Yale President Maurie McInnis and former president Peter Salovey, reflects a growing trend of U.S. institutions formalizing academic collaborations with European counterparts.



From left: Professor Gerasimos Siasos, Rector of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA); Professor Peter Salovey, former Yale President and distinguished psychologist; and Professor Maurie McInnis, President of Yale University. (Photo courtesy of the NKUA)

transatlantic entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Salvatore Moccia, dean of EIT Digital, praised the collaboration. "We are very energized by Seton Hall's membership in EIT Digital," he said. "This partnership opens doors for new collaborations and deeper connections between Europe and the United States."

"Today marks a milestone in this effort and a step forward toward a more open, modern, and globally connected university," said NKUA Rector Gerasimos Siasos during the June visit.

The program, scheduled to begin in 2026, is funded by the Greek government and supported by the

European Union and the Yale Club of Greece. It builds upon Yale's prior international initiatives under Salovey's leadership, including expansion into Africa and Asia. The Athens partnership will provide students and faculty from both institutions access to shared resources, research infrastructure, and policy networks focused on pressing global challenges such as climate change and public health.

Yale's presence in Greece was further underscored by the conferral of an honorary doctorate upon Salovey by NKUA, in recognition of his pioneering work in emotional intelligence and his higher education leadership. The visit served as both a symbolic and substantive step toward long-term institutional collaboration.

University of Arizona Refocuses Research Through Partnerships

Further west, the University of Arizona is redefining its research strategy through its newly renamed Office of Research and Partnerships (ORP). Formerly known as the Office of Research, Innovation, and Impact, the shift reflects a deliberate emphasis on collaboration—both domestic and international—to move discoveries from the lab to real world applications.

"Partnership is how we move from discovery to real world innovation that improves the lives of people everywhere," said Tomás Díaz de la Rubia, the university's senior vice president for ORP.

The office's strategy prioritizes joint ventures in biotech, clean energy, and data science, while also creating experiential learning opportunities for students through global internships and co-ops. These initiatives aim to cultivate talent pipelines and align research output with high-growth international markets.

Arizona's efforts extend beyond traditional academic boundaries. By working with industry leaders, governments, and nonprofits, the university seeks to ensure that its research not only advances knowledge but also delivers culturally relevant and accessible solutions on a global scale.

U.S.-China Ties Expand, Despite Tensions

In a development that surprised many observers, the Chinese Ministry of Education recently approved 23 new joint higher education initiatives with American universities—a dramatic increase from the previous year. The approvals came amid heightened U.S.-China trade tensions and a spate of closures of existing joint institutes by American institutions under political pressure.

Among the most notable is Illinois Institute of Technology's new venture with Beijing Information Science & Technology University (BISTU). The two institutions will launch the Illinois

commitment to global engagement despite geopolitical headwinds.

George Mason University also received approval to collaborate with Beijing's University of International Business and Economics on a 3+1 program in computational and data sciences, with Chinese students spending their final year in the United States. The structure mirrors a broader trend in China's transnational education sector, where students seek foreign degrees through locally delivered programs.

A Global Hedge Against Domestic Uncertainty

The recent wave of international partnerships is not merely

Global collaboration offers not only reputational and research benefits, but also stability in an increasingly fractured domestic environment.



College of Engineering in Beijing, offering dual degrees in computer, mechanical, and electrical engineering. Courses will be delivered by both American and Chinese faculty under a 4+0 model—with students completing their studies entirely in China.

BISTU emphasized that the programs involve conventional engineering disciplines and avoid sensitive technological areas, a distinction that may help the partnership avoid the scrutiny that derailed other U.S.-China collaborations in recent years.

Illinois Tech is also continuing a joint program with the China University of Geosciences in Wuhan and has announced plans to open a campus in Mumbai, India, further signaling its

aspirational. Many universities view them as essential hedges against domestic volatility—from budget cuts and restrictions on diversity and international students to federal efforts to reshape the very mission of public education.

By tapping into foreign funding, student markets, and research frameworks, institutions can diversify their revenue streams and academic output, reducing overreliance on U.S. political goodwill.

As American higher education navigates an era defined by uncertainty at home and opportunity broad, international engagement may no longer be optional—it may be the key to ensuring long-term relevance and resilience. ●



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Institutional Governance Faces Reckoning Post-Trump Era

By Misty Evans



Shared governance, the traditional balance of power between university boards and faculty, has come under unprecedented strain in the wake of the Trump administration's interventions. From federal funding threats to sweeping state mandates on curricula and inclusion programs, institutional autonomy and academic freedom now hang in the balance. This article examines how federal pressure, state-level mandates, and bans on DEI are remaking the landscape of higher education governance.

In 2025, the Trump administration paused more than \$9 billion in federal funding for leading universities, including Harvard University, Cornell University, Northwestern University, University of Pennsylvania, Brown University, Princeton University, and others, purportedly to address campus antisemitism and policy compliance. Harvard alone saw a freeze of roughly \$2.3 billion in grants, along with threats to revoke its tax-exempt status and imposing visa restrictions on international students, according to an article in *Reuters*.

In April, PBS detailed how Harvard filed suit in U.S. District Court, arguing that the government's actions represented unconstitutional overreach, aimed at coercing changes in governance, hiring, and admissions policies. The Harvard chapter of American Association of University Professors (AAUP) chapter also initiated a separate lawsuit, accusing the administration of wielding federal funding as leverage to undermine academic freedom.

In July, a federal hearing in Boston saw Judge Allison Burroughs express concern about the legality of the funding freeze. Harvard presented its

case that the cuts were retaliatory, i.e., “leveraging federal grants to control academic decisions.” At the same time, the government defended the move as necessary to combat antisemitic discrimination. The judge later granted an injunction stopping the enforcement of the visa ban, a decision that reaffirmed concerns about free speech and institutional autonomy.

These changes signal a broader shift in power from faculty-driven academic decisions to politically appointed boards and governors.

Beyond Harvard, *The Washington Post* detailed how Columbia reached a \$221 million settlement to restore \$400 million in withheld federal funding. The agreement included federal oversight on hiring, admissions, and DEI policies, prompting critics to warn of a dangerous precedent for governmental influence over campus governance.

While the second Trump administration's directive demanded that DEI programs be eliminated at schools or risk losing funding—a policy initially aimed at K–12 education—it sparked widespread institutional concern in higher education, according to *AP News*.

At the state level, numerous conservative-led legislatures and boards have imposed new governance restrictions. Iowa's Board of Regents, for instance, has proposed barring universities from requiring courses with “substantial content” related to DEI, critical race theory, or gender theory—marking a significant shift in what faculty can teach. This legislation, effective July 1, follows the passage of Iowa Senate File 418, which eliminates state protections related to gender identity and expands executive authority over postsecondary education.

AP News reports that nearly two dozen states are advancing similar measures to restrict how DEI is integrated into campus governance, altering boards' traditional role in academic matters.

Meanwhile, *The Washington Post* charted how red states are removing race and gender criteria from degree requirements and promoting Western civics curricula, framing these mandates as efforts to redefine educational content to support conservative models.

These changes signal a broader shift in power from faculty-driven academic decisions to politically appointed boards and governors.

In Iowa, public testimony before the Board of Regents revealed growing tensions. Some faculty members and students warned that banning DEI courses would erode campus diversity. At the same time, legislators argued that such requirements fall outside the trustees' educational purview, according to the *Iowa Capital News*.

Collectively, these shifts reflect a broader retreat from institutional commitment to inclusion, casting new doubt on whether universities can honor their pledges to inclusion and

shared governance.

Constitutional scholars and governance experts, including Erwin Chemerinsky, dean of the University of California, Berkeley Law School, have spoken out on the broader implications of federal and state interventions. Chemerinsky warns that using federal funding as a means of coercion threatens academic freedom and violates the fundamental principle of institutional autonomy. He emphasizes that courts are likely to scrutinize whether governmental demands amount to unconstitutional encroachments on free inquiry.

Richard Chait, an emeritus governance expert at Harvard, notes that trustees' increasing activism, especially in red-state contexts where board composition is politically influenced, carries the risk of politicizing academic decision-making.

An article in *Reuters* explained how legal analysts highlight recent rulings, such as Judge Burroughs's injunction in Harvard's case, which demonstrates the judiciary's willingness to protect universities when political pressures cross constitutional lines.

As universities navigate this uncertain terrain, many are organizing collective legal opposition. The AAUP, alongside 150 university presidents, condemned the Trump-era policies as "unprecedented government overreach." In turn, several faculty senates, including those at Big Ten campuses, adopted mutual defense agreements to resist external interference.

Nevertheless, universities also face mounting pressure to comply through financial settlements, such as Columbia's, restructuring faculty roles, or quietly scaling back DEI offerings without public backlash. Critics warn

that such actions risk institutional acquiescence and a diminished voice on campus for faculty.

The post-Trump landscape of higher education governance is being reshaped by competing forces: federal actors leveraging grants and visas, state leaders rewriting curricula and board authority, and institutions caught between legal resistance and political compromise. The viability of shared governance now depends on how universities choose to respond—whether by rallying collective legal and institutional defense, or gradually retreating under fiscal and regulatory pressure.

As constitutional scholars like Chemerinsky have noted, the work ahead will determine whether academic autonomy remains firm or continues to crumble in an era of escalating governmental influence. ●

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Brooklyn College Summit Tackles Perinatal Mental Health Crisis

By Erik Cliburn

In a groundbreaking effort

to confront one of the most overlooked contributors to maternal mortality, Brooklyn College hosted its inaugural Perinatal Mental Health Summit in April, bringing together more than 200 attendees across disciplines to spotlight mental health challenges that can occur during and after pregnancy. The summit, held in the Brownsville, NY, neighborhood—an area acutely affected by maternal health disparities—offered a rare blend of academic insight, community collaboration, and urgent public health messaging.

Hosted in partnership with Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso, the New York City Department of Health, and United for Brownsville, the event featured over a dozen mental and perinatal health experts. It also showcased Brooklyn College's new academic programming aimed at training the next generation of providers.

"The inaugural summit on perinatal mental health exemplifies the strength of partnerships united by a common cause," said Brooklyn College President Michelle J. Anderson, JD, LL.M. "[Reynoso] is a leader in tackling maternal health disparities and a vital ally in our mission to serve the community and improve health outcomes."

Though often underreported, perinatal mental health conditions—including postpartum depression, anxiety, and psychosis—are a leading cause of maternal mortality in the United States. Nationally, around one in seven women experience postpartum depression, according to summit speakers. Globally, WHO estimates that 10% of pregnant women and 13% of new mothers experience mental health disorders, with rates even higher in low-

and middle-income countries.

Keynote speaker Ashanda Saint-Jean, MD, an OB/GYN and maternal mortality review board member, underscored that mental health conditions now account for the largest share of maternal deaths. "There is a severe lack of support systems, particularly for women of color in Brooklyn," she told attendees. "We must reevaluate the current models and address the gaps in both care and compassion."

Associate professors Jacqueline Shannon, PhD, and Haroula Ntalla, who led the summit's planning, emphasized the importance of bridging clinical expertise with community needs. The event also introduced Brooklyn College's new Perinatal Mental Health Advanced

Certificate Program, the first of its kind in New York State. The program, developed in partnership with Reynoso's Maternal Health Task Force, launched two pilot courses this spring, with a full cohort expected in fall 2025.

"Perinatal mental health isn't just a women's issue or a health issue—it's a community issue," said Shannon. "If we want better outcomes, we must meet women where they are and arm our workforce with the knowledge and training to do just that."

The summit's powerful mix of personal testimony, academic research, and policy discussion signals a shift toward treating maternal mental health not as a side concern, but as central to the broader goals of health equity and family well-being. ●

A First-of-Its-Kind Certificate Program

Brooklyn College, in collaboration with Brooklyn borough President Antonio Reynoso's Maternal Health Task Force, has launched the first-ever Advanced Certificate in Perinatal Mental Health (PMH) in New York State. The year-long program is designed to equip healthcare providers, mental health practitioners, early intervention specialists, and early childhood educators with the skills to support pregnant and birthing individuals experiencing mental health challenges.

Set to begin its full rollout in fall 2025, the certificate includes 120 in-person clinical hours and was created with an explicit focus on reducing racial and socioeconomic disparities in access to preventative, comprehensive perinatal care. Two pilot courses are currently underway this spring.

"Mental health is the leading cause of pregnancy-associated death in New York City right now," said Reynoso. "Brooklyn College's Perinatal Mental Health program will be a key piece of the puzzle."

Brooklyn College President Michelle J. Anderson emphasized the initiative's real-world impact, calling it "a testament to our unwavering commitment to providing compassionate, community-driven education."

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Wired for Wellness:

How Colleges Are Using Tech to Transform Mental Health Care



From apps to AI, campuses are expanding access to mental health support through tech-powered tools

By Kat Castagnoli

The transition to college is often framed as a launchpad to adulthood—but for many students, it’s a psychological pressure cooker. Academic demands, social shifts, financial stress, and questions of identity all collide, making mental health a top concern. According to a 2024 *U.S. News–Generation Lab* report, 70% of students have experienced mental health challenges since entering college—yet only 37% have accessed on-campus resources.

“We’re dealing with an urgent public health issue in higher education,” says Dr. Ryan S. Patel, board member of the American College Health Association (ACHA) and chair of its Mental Health Section. “Students are struggling, and traditional models of care are simply not meeting the moment. That’s why institutions are turning to technology—not to replace human care, but to extend it.”

As mental health concerns intensify on campuses nationwide, colleges and universities are embracing digital tools and AI-driven innovations to provide broader, more equitable and easier access to care. These initiatives span teletherapy partnerships, app-

based support, digital cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), real-time data analytics, and AI chatbots that simulate human conversation.

The future of mental health in higher education may no longer be confined to a counselor’s office. Increasingly, it’s on a smartphone, in an algorithmically suggested video module, or even embedded in a learning management system.

Reaching Students Where They Are, When They Need It

At Northwood University, a private business school in Michigan, a recent rollout of TimelyCare—a 24/7 virtual care platform—dramatically expanded student access to licensed therapists, health coaching, and crisis support.

“We wanted a solution that wouldn’t just offer more appointments, but that would remove as many barriers to entry as possible,” says Lisa Fairbairn, Northwood’s provost and academic vice president. “TimelyCare gives students the ability to get support when they need it, not when a calendar says they can.”

The platform is available around the clock, including nights and weekends—times when traditional campus

counseling centers are often closed. That after-hours availability has proven vital, especially as students report experiencing the highest distress late at night or outside academic hours.

At a time when students are used to instantaneous digital engagement—from food delivery to social connections—mental health services that mimic that ease are more likely to be used.

“We have to stop expecting students to operate on our schedules,” Patel says. “Digital services give students privacy, immediacy, and agency—three things that are essential to modern care models.”

AI-Powered Early Intervention

Georgia State University is pushing the envelope even further with predictive analytics. Using AI models that analyze behavioral data—such as course logins, assignment submissions, and class attendance—the university can now identify students who may be at risk of academic decline or emotional distress, even before an issue emerges.

This proactive approach enables faculty and advisors to intervene early, offering personalized outreach or referrals to mental health services.

APA Calls for Guardrails on AI Mental Health Tools

As colleges adopt AI chatbots and digital wellness tools to support students, the American Psychological Association (APA) is calling for caution—and accountability. In its 2024 report, *Artificial Intelligence and Adolescent Well-Being*, the APA highlights the urgent need for safeguards when using AI with individuals ages 10 to 25.

Among the key concerns:

- Privacy and data protection
- Simulated relationships that may confuse emotional development
- Exposure to harmful or inaccurate content
- Targeted advertising that exploits mental vulnerability

To mitigate these risks, the APA recommends:

- Age-appropriate privacy settings and transparency in design
- Clear distinctions between AI tools and licensed therapy
- Integration of AI literacy into K-12 and college curricula
- Developer responsibility for adolescent safety from the start

The APA also calls for cross-sector collaboration—between psychologists, educators, technologists, and youth advocates—to ensure that as AI becomes more embedded in students’ lives, it supports rather than undermines their mental health and development.

“The power of data is not just in identifying who needs help—it’s in helping us reach out in a way that feels supportive, not punitive,” says Dr. Alison Brown, associate vice president for student success at Georgia State. “We want students to know someone is looking out for them, even if they haven’t asked for help yet.”

Similar tools are being used at the University of Central Florida and Arizona State University, where AI-based nudges and alerts are embedded within student portals to encourage engagement with mental health resources—particularly during high-stress periods like midterms or finals.

Scalable Mental Health Without the Waitlist

Even before COVID-19, many campus counseling centers struggled with long waitlists and high caseloads. Now, some institutions are augmenting traditional services with digital platforms designed to offer scalable, evidence-based mental health programming.

TAO Connect (Therapy Assistance Online), used by institutions such as the University of Florida and several University of California campuses, provides students with a self-guided suite of tools, allowing counselors to “prescribe” custom programs to supplement live sessions.

“TAO Connect provides a suite of resilience tools—video modules, mood tracking, mindfulness exercises—that students can explore at their own pace,” says Peter Cornish, Ph.D., director of counseling and psychological services at UC Berkeley’s University Health Services. “It lets students build skills between sessions and brings richer insights back into counseling—making care more dynamic and personalized.”

Platforms like Sanvello and Headspace for educators and students are rapidly gaining traction on campuses, offering guided meditations, stress-reduction exercises, and mood tracking at students’ fingertips. These tools aren’t just add-ons—they’re becoming integrated into wellness strategies, orientation programs,

and even course syllabi at a growing number of institutions.

And colleges aren’t simply handing students free app logins—they’re forging intentional partnerships with platforms that understand the rhythms and realities of campus life.

“To effectively respond to the campus mental health crisis, we want to support well-being holistically, augmenting traditional counseling

“We want students to know someone is looking out for them, even if they haven’t asked for help yet.”

with wellness tools that can transform stressors into resilience,” says Michael London, founder and CEO of Uwill, whose partnership with Headspace now supports more than two million students nationwide.

London notes that mindfulness tools work best when they’re not siloed, but embedded across multiple touchpoints—from residence life workshops to push notifications during finals week. The aim is to make mental health care both proactive and routine.

The Promise and Pitfalls of AI Companions

One of the more controversial developments in digital mental health is the rise of AI-driven chatbots. Tools like Woebot, Wysa, and Tess use natural language processing to mimic

empathetic conversation and provide real-time coping strategies for anxiety, depression, and stress. While early results show positive engagement—especially among students hesitant to speak with a human counselor—experts urge caution.

“Chatbots can be a helpful first step for students who aren’t ready for traditional care, but they should never be seen as replacements,” warns Dr. Yalda T. Uhls, a psychologist and founding director of the Center for Scholars & Storytellers at UCLA. “We need to be extremely clear about what these tools can and cannot do.”

The American Psychological Association echoed this warning in a 2024 report (see sidebar), citing risks such as data privacy, simulated relationships, and misinformation. The report calls for developers and institutions to implement age-appropriate safeguards and maintain human oversight when deploying AI tools for student well-being.

“AI can support adolescent well-being—but only if we prioritize safety and ethics,” says Dr. Uhls. “Without strong guardrails, we risk doing more harm than good.”

Redesigning Support for a New Era

As higher education adapts to increased demand for holistic student care, leaders are rethinking not just how mental health is delivered—but what counts as mental health care in the first place.

“Mental health isn’t just about therapy. It’s about belonging, workload, digital literacy, and a sense of community,” Patel says. “The institutions that thrive in this moment will be the ones that treat mental health as everyone’s responsibility—and use technology to weave care into the fabric of campus life.”

Whether it’s a chatbot that talks someone through a panic attack, an app that prompts a gratitude journal entry, or a text reminder that it’s time to breathe, the message is clear: support is no longer confined to an office with a waiting room. It’s wherever students are—and whenever they need it. ●

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Mental Health Takes Center Stage in Higher Ed

By Misty Evans





Mental health awareness is gaining steam across campuses nationwide, through related courses, faculty recognition and support, and cultural shifts.

In classrooms across the country, mental health is no longer just a student services concern—it's showing up in syllabi, becoming a credit-bearing topic, and reshaping how faculty talk about success.

As student demand for mental health support surges, colleges and universities are making a notable shift: moving away from a “resilience” framework—long criticized for implying students must simply “toughen up”—toward embedding wellness directly into institutional culture and curriculum.

According to the Healthy Minds Network, more than 60% of college students met criteria for at least one mental health problem in 2020-21, a figure that has remained high since the pandemic. At the same time, national conversations have expanded the definition of well-being to include community care, emotional literacy, and systemic supports.

Mental Health on the Syllabus

One of the most visible signs of the pivot is the rise of the “mental health syllabus statement.” While accessibility and Title IX language have been standard for years, a growing number of faculty now include proactive mental health messaging and resource guides alongside academic expectations. Here is just one example:

“I recognize that students may experience a range of challenges that can impact their well-being and academic performance. If you are struggling with your mental health, please know that you are not alone, and resources are available to support you. I

encourage you to reach out to [mention relevant campus resources] or speak with me directly.”

The University of Michigan's Center for Research on Learning and Teaching recommends including mental health statements that normalize help-seeking and link to campus services. Their sample language also encourages students to reach out to professors if they're struggling, acknowledging that learning is often impacted by emotional well-being.

At George Washington University, the Office of Advocacy and Support offers customizable syllabus language that identifies common stressors, such as financial insecurity and identity-based harassment, and emphasizes that well-being is integral to academic success.

Wellness Courses

Some institutions are going further by awarding credit for wellness education. Yale University made headlines when its wildly popular “Psychology and the Good Life” class—designed to teach students evidence-based strategies for increasing well-being—became the highest enrolled course in the university's history. The course has since been adapted into a free online version on Coursera, with over 4 million participants worldwide.

At Stanford University, the “Designing Your Life” course, which is built around human-centered design thinking, helps students reflect on purpose, values, and mental health through experiential learning. The course is so popular that it has spun off into a national network of faculty using

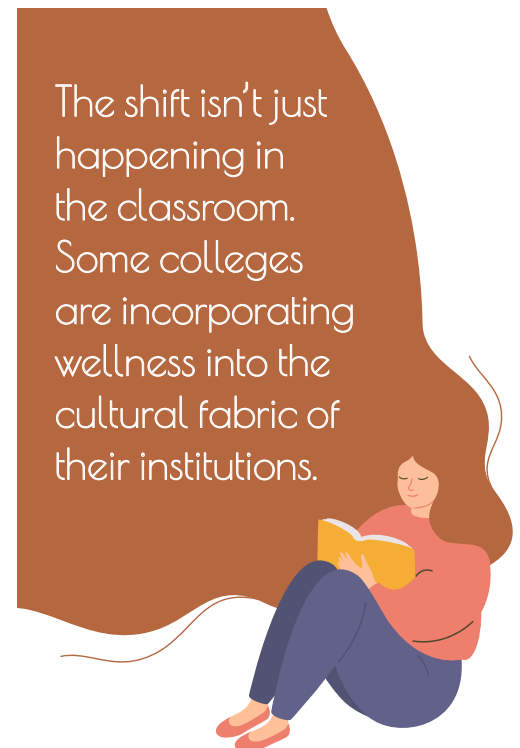
the framework at their own institutions.

Meanwhile, Florida State University launched its “Wellness and Resilience” course as part of a broader initiative to embed emotional well-being into the student experience. According to the university's Division of Student Affairs, the course covers topics ranging from mindfulness and gratitude to sleep hygiene and self-compassion.

Wellness as Culture, Not Just Crisis Response

The shift isn't just happening in the classroom. Some colleges are incorporating wellness into the cultural fabric of their institutions—by rethinking academic policies, retooling advising models, and creating spaces that foster a sense of community.

The shift isn't just happening in the classroom. Some colleges are incorporating wellness into the cultural fabric of their institutions.



At the University of Texas at Austin, the BeVocal bystander intervention program equips students to look out for each other across a range of mental health and safety issues. The program is part of the broader Longhorn Wellness Center, which uses a public health framework to embed well-being into campus life.

Similarly, the University of Southern California's Thrive initiative positions wellness as a collective responsibility. Faculty and staff receive training in "mental health first aid," and departments are encouraged to host wellness-based professional development and peer support events.

"Students can't get help for a problem they don't know they have—or if they think struggling means they've failed," said Kelly Greco, PsyD, associate director of outreach and prevention services at USC Student Health. "The goal is to build a culture

that makes mental health as natural to talk about as physical health."

Beyond the Counseling Center

While most campuses continue to expand clinical services, administrators say the pivot to wellness requires decentralizing support. That means training faculty to recognize signs of distress, equipping student leaders to respond to mental health concerns, and shifting the narrative around success and self-worth.

The American Council on Education recommends a whole-campus approach, emphasizing that a comprehensive mental health strategy should encompass academic affairs, housing, athletics, and other relevant areas. Their 2023 report, *Mental Health in Higher Education: A Collective Responsibility*, urges institutions to "move beyond a crisis-response model and cultivate campus cultures of care."

It's a shift that students are noticing—and often leading. At Brown University, student activists helped create "Mindfulness Month," a campus-wide initiative that includes yoga classes, sleep education, and drop-in meditation sessions. At UC Berkeley, the student government successfully advocated for wellness days built into the academic calendar.

A New Definition of Success

As colleges reconsider what it means to educate the whole student, mental health is no longer a siloed service—it's a lens through which teaching, learning, and leadership are being reimaged.

"This isn't about making students feel good at the expense of academic rigor," said Sara Abelson, senior director at the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. "It's about recognizing that students are human beings. And human beings learn best when they feel safe, supported, and well." ●



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The Loneliness Epidemic

Colleges create new ways for students to connect in light of post-pandemic social anxiety.

By Misty Evans



Students have been back on campus

for several years since the pandemic, but many say they still feel alone.

Loneliness among college students has reached record highs, with nearly half reporting persistent feelings of isolation, according to the 2023 National College Health Assessment by the American College Health Association. The problem is particularly acute among Gen Z students, who came of age during lockdowns and remote learning. Though campuses are now physically open, the social infrastructure needed to support meaningful connections hasn't fully rebounded.

"Students are showing up to college with fewer in-person social experiences and more anxiety about forming connections," said Dr. Sarah Ketchen Lipson, principal investigator for the Healthy Minds Network at Boston University.

Dorm Life Isn't What It Used to Be

Traditionally, residential life served as a key site for student bonding. But pandemic disruptions fractured that model. A 2023 Northeastern University case study on Rutgers University's Brothers, Organized, and Nurtured through Development (BOND) program found that structured peer mentorship dramatically improved students' sense of belonging, especially for first year and underrepresented students.

"We used to rely on passive programming—open doors, shared lounges," the report stated. "But students today need intentional scaffolding to build community."

Small cohort-style models are also gaining traction. While no public statement from Stanford University on its "connection pods"—initiatives the institution began post-COVID to foster student connections—was available, research supports this approach. A 2023 qualitative study published in the *Journal of Student Affairs Research & Practice* found that pod-style residence structures, or small,

intentional peer groups within dorms, helped facilitate deeper social connections and reduced feelings of isolation.

Clubs and campus events once offered an easy on-ramp to friendship, but student engagement has declined since the pandemic. A 2023 National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) report revealed that while 61% expressed interest in campus events, fewer than 25% attended regularly. This drop-off suggests a "social inertia" among students struggling to reengage with campus life.

To combat this, many institutions are experimenting with micro-social programming. Davidson College's informal "10-Minute Meet" initiative reflects a broader trend identified in student affairs research. Studies show that brief, structured peer interactions lower the barrier for connection and are more accessible to anxious or socially inexperienced students.

Digital connection has also become key. Arizona State University's "Devil2Devil" is a Discord community created for fall 2025 admitted students to connect with each other. Another social engagement platform, GroupMe Campus, is being used by more than 70% of U.S. college campuses according to their website. For new student bonding, recent research suggests that pre-arrival digital engagement can help jump start things. According to the same study, students who participated in virtual affinity groups before arriving on campus reported higher initial confidence in forming friendships.

Loneliness is not just a mental health issue; it's a belonging issue. And it disproportionately affects students from underrepresented backgrounds. According to a 2024 Gallup-Lumina Foundation report, first-generation college students are 30% more likely to feel isolated during their first year compared to their peers.

"Belonging isn't about one big program, it's about everyday signals that say, 'You matter here,'" said Dr. Terrell

Strayhorn, author of *College Students' Sense of Belonging*.

Faculty also play a critical role. "When instructors show empathy and build community in the classroom, students carry that confidence into the rest of campus," said Dr. Jennifer Keup, director of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience at the University of South Carolina.

Best Practices for Rebuilding Connection

Institutions seeking to reverse the loneliness trend are adopting whole-campus strategies, including the following recommended by experts:

- **Redesigning orientation:** Shifting from information-heavy sessions to experiential activities focused on relationship building.
- **Training resident assistants:** Equipping them to foster inclusive, emotionally safe spaces.
- **Peer mentorship programs:** Programs like Rutgers' BOND initiative offer a model for structured, identity-based community building.
- **Promoting group therapy and support circles:** Normalize these resources as proactive tools, not just for crises.
- **Launching visibility campaigns:** Ohio State University's "You Belong Here" initiative uses signage, videos, and social media to remind students of their value and visibility.

As institutions look ahead, many are recognizing that the antidote to loneliness isn't more events, but rather a shift in approach. It's about recognizing what students' needs are and providing them with tools and supports and they will embrace to authentically build a community, one relationship at a time. ●



University of Arkansas to Lead \$10M Statewide Mental Health Crisis Hub

By Erik Cliburn

A team at the University of Arkansas (UA) is leading a transformative \$10 million initiative to address the state's fragmented behavioral health crisis prevention and response system. Funded by the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS), the project will establish a central hub and seven regional pilot sites, aiming to provide a comprehensive, coordinated response to mental health emergencies across the state.

The effort is spearheaded by Johanna Thomas, PhD, LCSW, director of the UA School of Social Work, who brings more than a decade of experience implementing behavioral health programs across Arkansas and the U.S.

"Currently, Arkansas does not have a coordinated statewide system of crisis care to address behavioral health needs for children and adults to this extent," Thomas said in a university announcement. "What we're creating together begins with prevention and early intervention, and then focuses on crisis intervention and guidance to follow up with treatment available for those who need it."

The need is urgent. In 2020, Arkansas ranked as the least healthy state in the nation when it comes to mental health services, according to DHS. Nearly one in five adults in the state reported frequent mental distress—significantly higher than the national average.

The crisis hub is a cornerstone of DHS' Roadmap to a Healthier Arkansas, a multi-year strategy funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The Roadmap identifies

major gaps in the behavioral health care continuum, particularly around early intervention, crisis response, and stabilization. The new response system was specifically designed to address these issues by connecting people to the right care at the right time—whether that means telehealth support, mobile response teams, or referral to community-based treatment facilities.

"Mental health and addiction are statewide issues—so our response has to be statewide too," said Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders. "Through programs like the new crisis hub, we can address both adults' and childrens' needs early and often."

The statewide model includes a 24/7 centralized call center, mobile crisis teams, and integration with local law enforcement, hospitals, and social services. Seven regional sites—in El Dorado, Monticello/Warren, Fort Smith, Fayetteville, Jonesboro, Helena, and Little Rock—will launch in phases beginning in late 2025. All are expected to be fully operational by mid-2026.

Thomas emphasized that each pilot site will reflect the unique resources and needs of its region.

"The model we create together will be flexible enough to capitalize on pre-existing networks and associations with the providers, like hospitals, who already make up the fabric of the area," she said. "The shared vision is that the intensity, severity, and duration of behavioral crises experienced by individuals will be reduced, saving valuable resources for Arkansas while stabilizing our most vulnerable citizens."

In addition to infrastructure and workforce planning, the UA-led team will oversee the awarding of subgrants and collaborate with DHS to implement the strategic plan. This includes a focus on populations with heightened needs—such as children, individuals with serious mental illness or substance use disorders, and pregnant or postpartum women.

The centralized hub will also support telehealth consultations, de-escalation training for crisis responders, and a data platform to track system capacity and outcomes. This closed-loop communication will help reduce emergency room visits and ensure people receive follow-up care after an acute episode.

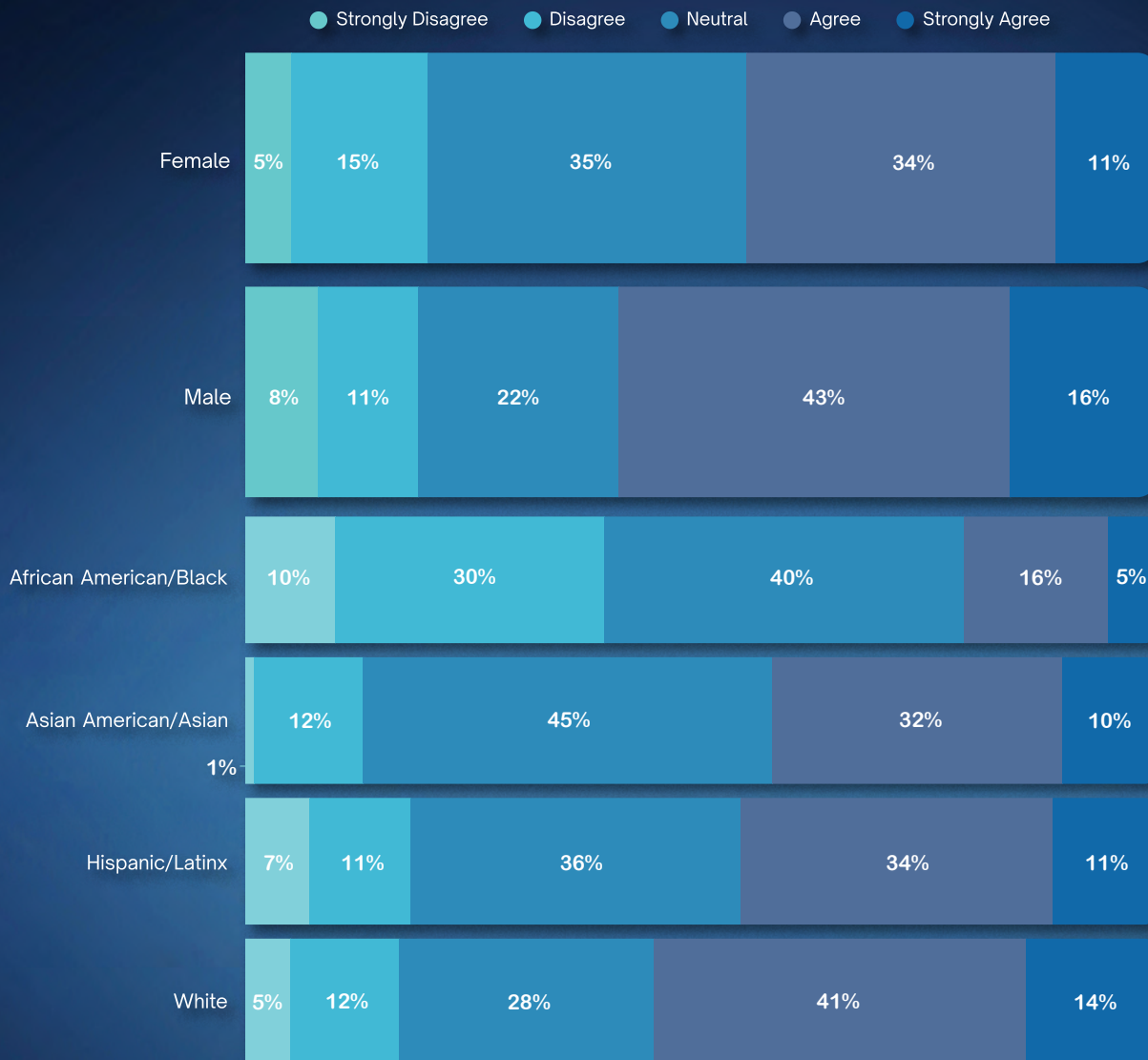
Paula Stone, director of the DHS Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, underscored the importance of the collaboration.

"We are proud to partner with the University of Arkansas to develop a statewide coordinated crisis response system," Stone said. "This work will address gaps in our system and ensure that services are available both to prevent situations from escalating to crisis level and to support Arkansans in need in times of crisis."

The new hub is just one of more than 15 ARPA-funded pilots and initiatives, including projects for substance abuse recovery, family-centered mental health care, and supportive housing.

For Thomas and her team, the goal is not only system-wide reform, but also lasting change. ●

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Mental Health First Aid to Address Student Well-Being Crisis

By Erik Cliburn

As mental health challenges

among college students continue to rise, more institutions are adopting Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) to prepare campus communities to recognize and respond to signs of distress. With nearly half of college students reporting mental health struggles and one-third of dropouts citing these challenges as their primary reason, universities are increasingly seeking proactive solutions.

Developed as a peer-reviewed, evidence-based instructional model by the National Council for Mental Well-being, MHFA training equips participants with the tools to recognize early signs of mental health or substance use issues, provide initial support, and connect individuals to appropriate resources. The course, offered virtually or in person, is open to faculty, staff, coaches, resident advisors, student leaders, and the broader student body. Over 650 colleges and universities across the country have implemented the program, joining a network that includes more than four million trained individuals.

The University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill has emerged as a leader in campus mental health education. Since the fall 2022 semester, UNC has prepared over 1,600 faculty, staff, and students through this initiative, thanks to efforts led by the Behavioral Health Springboard (BHS) at the School of Social Work. Originally funded by a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) grant, the training is now sustained through university and state support.

“From a faculty and staff perspective, there’s a lot of frontline work that happens in the classroom, where you notice students’ struggles day in and day out,” Tiffany Edouard, MHFA coordinator at BHS, said in a March 2025 case study. “It’s incredible to be able to not just refer them to an academic counselor but to actually intervene and assess what resources they need.”

UNC has since expanded its offerings to include youth and teen MHFA, allowing peer mentors and students to gain the same skills once reserved for faculty and staff. The results speak volumes. After completing the instruction, 82% of participants felt confident responding to a substance use concerns, and 81.4% felt prepared to ask someone if they were considering suicide. Nearly all participants—98%—said they would recommend the program to others.

The initiative’s success has inspired many to become certified instructors, with 15 private sessions hosted since 2023. These small cohort-based classes have certified nearly 200 new leaders, accelerating the campaign’s expansion across North Carolina. The state has since invested \$4.6 million to bring the curriculum to underserved communities, tribal colleges, and rural areas.

Montclair State University (MSU) in New Jersey is also leveraging the MHFA framework to enhance campus well-being. Introduced in 2022 through a grant, the eight-hour, in-person course has since certified over 1,500 students, faculty, and staff. Certification

Why Mental Health First Aid Matters

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is more than just a class—it’s a critical intervention tool for campuses facing a growing mental health crisis. With 49% of students reporting mental health struggles and 33% of college dropouts citing this as a factor, timely support is essential. Yet, 40% of faculty say they don’t feel prepared to talk with students about mental health or substance use.

MHFA bridges this gap. Backed by over 72 peer-reviewed studies, the evidence-based program teaches participants how to identify signs of distress, respond with empathy, and guide others toward professional help. More than 4 million people in the U.S. have completed the course, with support from 15,000 certified instructors.

The training is tailored for campus life and is available to faculty, student leaders, coaches, and the general student population—in person or virtually. When more people are prepared to act, more lives can be helped.



lasts three years and empowers participants to identify, understand, and respond to a range of concerns, from anxiety and depression to substance use and psychosis.

“[MHFA] helps people develop the skills to notice [the] signs and symptoms of common mental health issues and challenges,” said Jude M. Uy, a MSU staff psychologist and coordinator of prevention and wellness programming. “What we find is that individuals who go through the instruction actually report better mental health themselves.”

Feedback from Montclair faculty has been overwhelmingly positive. “They’re catching things earlier and directing students to the right resources,” said Melissa Zarin, associate director of counseling and psychological services. She noted that the experience helps break down stigma, encouraging people to ask direct, sometimes life-saving questions without fear of overstepping.

Recognizing the importance of cultural sensitivity, Montclair’s effort also addresses stigma within different communities. “For some cultures, discussing mental health issues outside the family is considered disgraceful,” Uy said. “That’s the beauty of [this program]—it empowers our community to support one another in ways that feel appropriate and effective.”

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Montclair counselors have observed increases in social anxiety, eating disorders, and academic stress. MHFA has become one part of a broader wellness strategy that includes peer counseling, therapy groups, prevention events, and sensory spaces.

At both UNC-Chapel Hill and Montclair State, this approach has proven to be more than just a training—it’s a catalyst for cultural change. By empowering community members with the skills to intervene early, colleges are creating environments where mental health is prioritized, and help is always within reach. ●

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Neurodivergent Students on Campus

From Accommodation to Belonging

By Misty Evans

As the number of neurodivergent students in higher education continues to rise, colleges and universities are expanding their approaches to supporting them, moving beyond legal compliance toward inclusive design and a more profound sense of belonging.

The term neurodivergent refers to individuals whose cognitive functioning differs from what is considered typical, including students with autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, dyslexia, and other neurological conditions. In the 2023 National College Health Assessment, 33.4% of students reported having been diagnosed with a neurodevelopmental disorder, up from 24.3% in 2019. This growing visibility is prompting a reevaluation of institutional practices that have traditionally focused on accommodating individuals with disabilities rather than promoting their inclusion.

Universal Design in Practice

Some institutions are adopting Universal Design for Learning (UDL), an educational framework that anticipates learner variability and reduces barriers from the outset. Developed by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), UDL emphasizes multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression benefiting all students, not just those with formal diagnoses.

At the University of Vermont, for instance, faculty are encouraged to build flexibility into syllabi by offering students options in how they demonstrate learning. "When we incorporate UDL, we reduce the need for retroactive accommodations," said Kiersten Hallquist, director of the Center for Teaching and Learning. "It's a proactive approach to inclusion."

Research supports this shift. A 2022 study published in *Innovative Higher Education* found that students in courses using UDL principles reported higher satisfaction and lower levels of stress and anxiety compared to traditional lecture-based courses.

Peer Mentorship and Social Belonging

In addition to classroom changes, some colleges are bolstering peer mentorship programs to support neurodivergent students in navigating

academic and social life.

At the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), the Spectrum Support Program pairs autistic students with trained peer coaches who assist with everything from executive functioning to social integration. According to the program's 2022 annual report, 89 percent of participating students reported that the support improved their overall college experience.

"It's not just about academics, it's about helping students feel like they belong," said Laurie Ackles, director of the program. "A lot of our students say this is the first place where they've really felt understood."

The University of Michigan's Adaptive Sports and Inclusive Recreation program uses a similar peer-based model, integrating neurodivergent and physically disabled students into intramural sports and leadership opportunities. "Social inclusion is a huge piece of wellness and mental health," said Dr. Oluwaferanmi Okanlami, director of the program.

Inclusive Pedagogy

Faculty also play a pivotal role in fostering inclusion through inclusive pedagogy, a teaching philosophy that recognizes diverse ways of thinking and learning.

"Neurodiversity is an asset in the classroom," said Kelly Dawson, an instructor at the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts and an advocate for neurodivergent inclusion in media and education. "When faculty embrace different processing styles and allow for creativity in participation, everyone benefits."

Educational businesses offer comprehensive courses for educators on how to create truly inclusive classrooms for neurodivergent students. For example, Structural Learning features "Neurodiversity in the Classroom: A Teacher's Guide" module, crafted by Paul Main. Published in November 2021, it provides practical, strength-based strategies that celebrate neurological diversity, such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia, and guides educators through adapting instruction for varied learning needs. Visitors are invited to submit a "Course Enquiry" to access the full

instructional program, which emphasizes flexible teaching, universal design principles, and empowers every student to thrive.

Institutions like Stanford University have launched faculty development programs focused on inclusive teaching strategies, including training on how to design assignments with flexible deadlines, provide lecture transcripts, and engage students with different sensory or attention needs. According to Stanford's Office of the Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning, these strategies have not only improved engagement but also reduced grade disparities.

In a 2021 article in the *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, researchers emphasized that faculty awareness and attitudes significantly impact the success of neurodivergent students, often more so than accommodations.

Moving Beyond Compliance

Despite promising models, challenges remain. Disability resource offices are often underfunded and understaffed, and many students still feel there is stigma in seeking support. A 2023 report from the National Center for College Students with Disabilities found that while more students identify as neurodivergent, only a fraction register with campus disability services due to fear of discrimination or bureaucratic hurdles.

Experts say that shifting campus culture requires institutions to rethink who their "average student" is.

In an article published by the *Journal of Neurodevelopmental Education* and archived in PubMed Central, authors from UC Davis advocate for a systemic reframing of "typical" student profiles. They argue that universities should dismantle neurotypical-centric assumptions—like expecting all learners to conform to a single mode of communication or attendance—and instead integrate universal design, sensory preferences, and inclusive modalities campus-wide. The piece states that institutions must become "destination campuses for neurodivergent people" by embedding flexible pathways, sensory accommodations, and choice in how students engage, communicate, and learn. ●



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Overhauled JED Campus Program Brings Tailored Mental Health Support to Colleges

By Erik Cliburn

In response to the evolving landscape of college student mental health, the Jed Foundation (JED) has unveiled major enhancements to its flagship JED Campus program—a nationwide initiative designed to guide colleges and universities in building comprehensive systems of mental health support. The latest updates are specifically tailored for community colleges, graduate and professional schools, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and other minority-serving institutions (MSIs), marking a strategic effort to address the nuanced needs of different student populations.

Launched in 2013, JED Campus has helped more than 530 institutions across 44 states and several countries implement data-informed approaches to protect student emotional health and prevent suicide. With these new enhancements, the program now integrates insights from nearly 500 schools, a comprehensive literature review, and expert recommendations to better support underserved and underrepresented student groups.

“The state of college student mental health is always evolving,” said Tony Walker, JED’s senior vice president of academic programs. “As a result, our approach to protecting emotional health and preventing suicide among teens and young adults nationwide should also transform to meet the needs of today and tomorrow.”

For community colleges—many of which lack on-campus counseling services—the revised program includes recommendations for leveraging community partnerships, accessing affordable care, and creating crisis protocols that include support for dual-enrollment high school students. The updated

model also considers the unique challenges of commuter campuses by promoting strategies to foster social connectedness and belonging.

Graduate and professional schools, whose students often juggle high-pressure academic environments with clinical rotations or field placements, will benefit from new guidance on trauma-informed care during internships and practicum experiences. JED also addresses inconsistencies in medical leave and withdrawal policies, encouraging more humane, transparent practices across graduate programs.

By building flexibility into its framework, JED Campus aims to help schools create mental health ecosystems that reflect the lived experiences of their student bodies, rather than relying solely on traditional residential-campus models.

HBCUs and MSIs will receive specialized recommendations focused on cultivating student belonging, enhancing faculty-student mentorship, and breaking down stigma around mental health care. These strategies are designed to boost help-seeking behavior—a crucial metric, particularly among Black students who, according to JED, may face systemic and cultural barriers to accessing support.

JED emphasizes that while these enhancements are tailored, they are meant to uplift all participating institutions by embedding best practices

gleaned from MSIs into its broader programming. The updated guidance also strengthens the tools used in strategic planning and assessment phases, allowing schools to develop more responsive mental health systems based on real-time needs.

To date, JED Campus has impacted the lives of more than 6.7 million students. As the mental health crisis in higher education continues to intensify—fueled by growing rates of anxiety, depression, and burnout—JED’s move to differentiate its services by institution type reflects a growing awareness that one-size-fits-all solutions are no longer sufficient.

Current JED Campus institutions can access the new guidance through their assigned advisors, while alumni and schools are encouraged to reconnect to explore updated resources. The foundation also offers assistance for institutions seeking funding to participate.

These enhancements arrive at a time when colleges are facing mounting pressure to address mental health with more focus on belonging, and nuance. National data continues to show disproportionate access and outcomes for students of color, first-generation students, and those enrolled in nontraditional institutions.

By building flexibility into its framework, JED Campus aims to help schools create mental health ecosystems that reflect the lived experiences of their student bodies, rather than relying solely on traditional residential-campus models. The updates are also intended to encourage broader campus-wide engagement, involving not just counseling centers but academic departments, student affairs, and peer-led efforts. ●

New JED Collaborative Addresses Student Parent Needs

Building on its mission to deliver customized mental health support, the Jed Foundation has launched a new initiative focused on an often-overlooked population in higher education: student parents.

Announced in April 2025, the JED Campus Collaborative for Student Parents brings together 10 community colleges in a peer-based network designed to implement strategies from "Improving Mental Health of Student Parents: A Framework for Higher Education," a report JED co-authored with Ascend at the Aspen Institute.

More than three million undergraduates in the U.S. are student parents, yet they remain largely underserved. Research shows that at least 30% experience symptoms of anxiety or depression—a rate significantly higher than other students. Many are unaware of available mental health resources, and 38% have considered dropping out.

"Student parents face unique challenges and responsibilities, sometimes leading to their mental health being sidelined," said JED CEO John MacPhee. "We're proud to launch this collaborative as a way to provide tailored and strategic support for a large and often overlooked population of college students."

Participating schools include San Antonio College, College of Lake County, and Hudson Valley Community College, among others. Each will implement at least two targeted interventions aimed at enhancing mental health services for student parents, particularly mothers, and contribute to a shared learning network to advance systemic change.

"This is a meaningful step toward real action," said Marjorie Sims, managing director of Ascend. "Mental health support for student parents must be intentional, integrated, and sustained."

The project is supported by the Educational Credit Management Corporation (ECMC) Foundation. JED hopes to expand the model to additional institutions nationwide.

THE ALAMO COLLEGES DISTRICT IS PROUD TO BE A 2025 EXCELLENCE IN MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING AWARD RECIPIENT



NORTHEAST LAKEVIEW COLLEGE

NORTHWEST VISTA COLLEGE

PALO ALTO COLLEGE

SAN ANTONIO COLLEGE

ST. PHILIP'S COLLEGE

The Alamo Colleges is a family of five colleges that share a mutual passion for providing pathways to higher education leading to high-wage, high-value careers. Our credits transfer to four-year universities for those pursuing bachelor's or higher degrees. And our workforce development programs help individuals build new careers and meet the needs of business.



ALAMO COLLEGES DISTRICT



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Supporting Minds, Strengthening Campuses



*A WELLNESS TOOLKIT
SERIES FOR HIGHER ED
LEADERS, FACULTY,
AND STAFF*



Cornell University in Ithaca, New York

Free, Research-Informed Tools to Transform Your Faculty and Staff Wellness Strategy

Burnout, compassion fatigue, and mental health strain are increasing across campuses—especially among faculty and staff who keep institutions running. But supporting your people doesn't have to be expensive, complicated, or reactive.

That's where *Insight Into Academia's* **Mental Health & Wellness Toolkit Series** comes in. These free, easy-to-implement resources give campus leaders and HR professionals **actionable strategies to protect well-being, reduce turnover, and foster a thriving academic culture—**without draining institutional budgets.

From peer support models to low-cost interventions and real-life success stories from innovative universities, each toolkit is designed to be practical, evidence-based, and ready for implementation. Whether you're launching a new wellness initiative or strengthening existing programs, you'll find the tools to meet this moment with confidence and care.

Because a healthy campus begins with a supported team.

Explore our most popular downloads on the next page. Scan the QR codes to access each toolkit instantly.

FREE TOOLKIT 1:

How Campuses Can Support Staff Well-Being (Without Burning Out Their Budget)

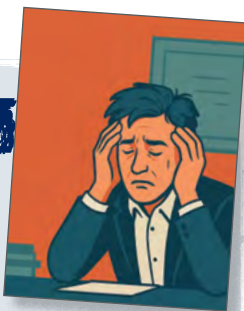
This toolkit offers practical, budget-friendly strategies to uplift staff wellness without straining institutional resources. Key components include:

Micro-interventions: Simple yet effective actions, like “check-in” meetings or brief recognition moments, that require little to no budget but boost morale.

Work environment tweaks: Reimagining communal spaces or providing flexible scheduling to support staff autonomy and job satisfaction.

Peer support systems: Encouraging staff-to-staff check-ins, small groups, or informal mentorship programs to build solidarity and reduce isolation.

Ideal for administrators seeking concrete, low-cost methods to create a caring culture on campus.



FREE TOOLKIT 3:

10 Universities Leading the Way in Faculty Wellness

This toolkit showcases inspiring campus-wide models to spark ideas and innovation:

University of Utah: Resiliency Center offering trauma-informed care and Mental Health First Aid training for faculty and staff.

UCLA (Be Well UCLA): A comprehensive wellness ecosystem with counseling, mindfulness courses, nutrition coaching, ergonomics support, and targeted initiatives for underrepresented groups.

University of Colorado Boulder: Faculty & Staff Assistance Program featuring counseling, stress management workshops, and departmental wellness consulting.

Additional cases from **University of Rochester**, **University of Iowa**, **University of California Santa Cruz**, **University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign**, and other institutions outline creative efforts, including wellness incentives, coaching, peer support, and inclusive programming.

Each university offers replicable models, with insights on implementation, outcomes, and scalable best practices.



FREE TOOLKIT 2:

7 Practical Faculty Burnout Solutions Every Campus Should Be Using

Focused on combating faculty burnout head-on, this toolkit outlines seven high-impact interventions:

1. **Conduct workload audits** to ensure responsibilities are distributed equitably.
2. **Peer-support pods** where faculty meet regularly to share victories and challenges.
3. **Mental Health First Aid training** equips faculty to recognize and address emotional distress in colleagues or students.
4. **Structured time-off policies**, such as mandatory sabbaticals or decompression weeks, can be beneficial.
5. **Administrative support systems**, including triage counselors and buffer roles to lift non-teaching burdens.
6. **Mindfulness and stress-reduction workshops**, integrating wellness into the academic cycle.
7. **Culture-shift consulting**, helping departments adopt healthier norms rather than relying on individual coping.

Check out this roadmap for sustainable, systemic change—designed for leaders ready to invest in lasting faculty well-being.



**DOWNLOAD THESE FREE TOOLKITS AT
INSIGHTINTOACADEMIA.COM TODAY!**

Building Bridges, Not Barriers



For decades, Indiana University has worked diligently to build a campus community where people from all backgrounds have access to the tools and support they need to thrive throughout their college journey and beyond.

“Creating a diverse student body is paramount to student success. When you interact with people from different backgrounds who have different perspectives, viewpoints, and cultures, profound learning can take place. This is an important part of what it means to be a student at Indiana University,” says Rashad Nelms, interim vice president for the Office of the Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. “And it’s why we are so committed to building an equitable and inclusive campus community.”

IU’s work has again been recognized by *INSIGHT Into Diversity*, the country’s largest, oldest, and most respected national diversity- and inclusion-focused publication in higher education. This year, for the tenth consecutive time, the magazine honored IU Bloomington with the **2024 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) award** and the **Diversity Champion Award** for the eighth consecutive year. Known for visionary leadership, Indiana University is considered an institution that sets the standard for inclusive excellence and for implementing efforts to promote student success for all.





Insight Into Academia is proud to present the 2025 Mental Health and Well-Being Award Recipients:

Alamo Colleges District	Mount St. Joseph University
Alvernia University	Nazareth University
Arizona State University	New Jersey Institute of Technology
Baylor College of Medicine	Nova Southeastern University
Brevard College	Oakland Community College
Central Connecticut State University	Orvis School of Nursing, University of Nevada, Reno
Central Michigan University	Pellissippi State Community College
Claremont Graduate University	Pikes Peak State College
Colorado State University Pueblo	Pratt Institute
CUNY York College	Ramapo College of New Jersey
DePauw University	Ringling College of Art and Design
Drexel University	Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Eastern Illinois University	Southern Illinois University, Carbondale
Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine	Southern Oregon University
Florida Institute of Technology	St. Mary's University, San Antonio, TX
Frontier Nursing University	Stockton University
Goucher College	Stony Brook University
Grand Valley State University	SUNY Old Westbury
Harper College	Syracuse University, Whitman School of Management
Harris-Stowe State University	Tarrant County College
Harvey Mudd College	Towson University
Hudson County Community College	University at Albany, State University of New York
Indiana University	University of California, Davis, School of Veterinary Medicine
Kennesaw State University	The University of California, Irvine
Lesley University	University of Connecticut
Livingstone College	University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine
Loyola Marymount University	The University of Georgia College of Pharmacy
Macomb Community College	University of Houston College of Pharmacy
Malcolm X College	University of Maryland, Baltimore
Meridian Community College	University of Nebraska College of Law
Miami University	University of New Mexico
Mississippi State University College of Veterinary Medicine	University of Pittsburgh
Missouri University of Science and Technology	University of Richmond
Molloy University	University of South Florida College of Nursing
Montgomery County Community College	Upstate Medical University
Moraine Valley Community College	Wake Technical Community College
Mount Mary University	Wichita State University

PELLISSIPPI STATE

is committed to creating a culture that
**TRANSFORMS LIVES, CAREERS
AND COMMUNITIES.**



Pellissippi State is honored to be an award recipient. This recognition affirms our ongoing commitment to fostering a college environment that prioritizes mental health, belonging and holistic well-being for all.

Mission

Pellissippi State Community College provides a transformative environment fostering the academic, social, economic and cultural enrichment of the individual and the community. We are committed to success in workforce training and certificate and degree programs.

Values

Accountability

We are responsible for our actions and accountable to each other for the betterment of our students, college, and the community.

Access

We provide open and accessible growth opportunities for all.

Active Learning

We ensure learning flourishes through quality, engaging, real-world experiences that empower students and employees to excel.

Achievement

We pursue and celebrate student and employee excellence by continuously striving to meet and exceed our goals.

Advancement

We support and improve our community through education, partnerships, and service.

Agility

We swiftly and collaboratively adapt and respond to a rapidly changing world.



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A TBR INSTITUTION/AN EEO COLLEGE

The 2025 Insight Into Academia Mental Health and Well-Being Award

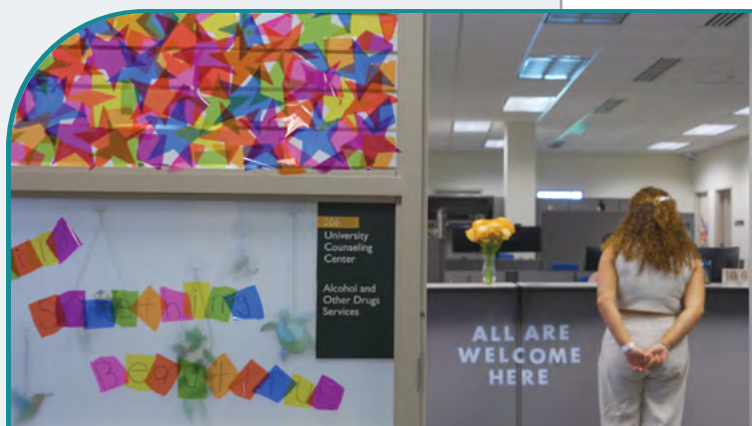
At a time when mental health is a growing concern across all areas of higher education, the 2025 Insight Into Academia Excellence in Mental Health and Well-Being Award recognizes colleges and universities that are setting a new standard for care, support, and belonging. These honorees have implemented exemplary programs and initiatives that foster emotional resilience, expand access to services, and embed well-being into the fabric of campus life—for students, faculty, and staff alike.

The institutions featured demonstrate that mental health is not a side initiative—it's a core priority. From trauma-informed counseling to peer-led outreach and policy innovation, their efforts serve as models for campuses nationwide. We are proud to honor these institutions for their unwavering commitment to mental health and their leadership in building healthier, more inclusive learning communities.



Service Animals

Pratt students enjoy a break from classes to decompress with therapy dogs.



Welcoming Centers

The University Counseling Center at Grand Valley State University is the hub for mental health and well-being on campus.



Nature

The labyrinth garden at Colorado State University Pueblo serves as a respite for students to relax and meditate.



Physical Health

Ringling College of Art and Design employees take part in a yoga class held in a historic, wood-paneled campus room.



Alamo Colleges District

With five Advocacy Centers offering counseling, food and clothing assistance, and emergency aid, Alamo Colleges District (ACD) is transforming student support. A data-driven Mental Health Strategic Plan has enabled over 8,000 counseling sessions and 21,000 advocacy calls. Through a telehealth pilot and widespread Mental Health First Aid training, ACD is building a robust culture of care that drives student persistence and success.

Arizona State University

At Arizona State University (ASU), suicide prevention is embedded in daily campus life through safeTALK training for students, staff, and faculty. Initiatives like the “I’m All Ears” Friendship Bench and extensive employee counseling reflect the university’s broad, compassionate approach. Prioritizing early intervention and stigma reduction, ASU models a proactive culture of well-being.

Colorado State University Pueblo

Proving that small campuses can lead with innovation, Colorado State University Pueblo offers creative services like Acuwellness acupuncture and Art Connections therapy. These accessible, low-cost offerings reflect a culturally aware model rooted in the values of a Hispanic-Serving Institution—and deeply resonate with the student community.

Grand Valley State University

One of the first U.S. institutions to adopt the Okanagan Charter, Grand Valley State University leads with innovation. Peer wellness ambassadors, a mental health app, and drop-in counseling stations complement unlimited sick leave and basic needs support—creating a fully integrated system of care for all.



Student Counseling

A student meets with a counselor at the Northwest Vista College Student Advocacy & Resource Center in the Alamo Colleges District.

Lesley University

Creativity fuels Lesley University’s approach to mental health. Its Threshold Program supports neurodiverse learners, while expressive therapies—art, dance, drama, music—are embedded into curriculum and care. Urgent support, community partnerships, and inclusive counseling create a vibrant ecosystem of wellness for all.

Livingstone College

At Livingstone College, wellness is more than a trend—it’s a transformative campus culture. Through the work of the Mental Health Task Force, the college has normalized mental health conversations and created stigma-free spaces for care. Events like “Are You Good?” Week and Study + Chill Jams—complete with music, snacks, and late-night vibes—invite students to pause and prioritize their well-being.

Macomb Community College

For over 20 years, Macomb Community College (MCC) has built a wellness infrastructure grounded in equity, cultural inclusion, and sustained support. Programs like Macomb Multicultural International Initiatives (MMII), 24/7 access to counseling via Uwill, and LGBTQIA+ allyship training reflect a deep commitment to student and staff well-being. With reflection rooms, suicide prevention education, and food pantries, MCC is showing that mental health isn’t a one-time effort—it’s a shared campus responsibility.



Artistic Expression

Students at Rutgers University participate in an art therapy session, painting at tables in a bright, open studio space.



Malcolm X College

Malcolm X College (MXC) is setting a new benchmark for community college mental health services. With the largest on-site team of licensed professionals in the city of Chicago, MXC offers flexible, accessible support that meets students where they are—emotionally and physically. The college's ad hoc counseling model allows for real-time intervention, and the data proves its impact: students who receive support show a 15% boost in academic outcomes.

Meridian Community College

Meridian Community College (MCC) is showing how creativity and compassion can redefine campus wellness. Its Wellness Wednesday series combines practical resources and emotional support—think bento boxes with safety tips, “Paws and Reflect” stuffed-animal mental health kits and grief-focused faculty development. MCC also offers 24/7 virtual counseling, on-campus mental health services, and flexible policies like allowing employees to bring children to work during emergencies.

Missouri University of Science and Technology

Missouri University of Science and Technology has made well-being a collective mission rooted in peer leadership and strategic alignment. Through its Faculty Well-Being Champions and Student Ambassador programs, the university has built a strong, visible network of advocates equipped to guide peers, reduce stigma, and promote resources. These efforts are reinforced by 24/7 peer support platforms, suicide prevention training, response guides, and integrated leadership coaching. The results are clear: between 2022 and 2025, student-reported stress, anxiety, and depression dropped by double digits.



Music Therapy

Molloy University students engage in a hands-on music therapy class, using instruments to explore rhythm and sound together.

Moraine Valley Community College

For more than 50 years, Moraine Valley Community College has led the way in holistic student support. Its Counseling & Career Development Center offers same- or next-day access to academic, personal, and career counseling. Through Project Care, students can access a food pantry, emergency financial assistance, wellness workshops, and referrals for basic needs like housing and health care. Launched in 2007 as a small financial aid initiative, Project Care has grown into a campus-wide safety net powered by grants, donors, and community partnerships.

Mount St. Joseph University

Mount St. Joseph University (MSJ) has placed mental health at the heart of its institutional strategy. Guided by the “To New Heights” strategic plan, the university is expanding mental health education and support across academics, athletics, and campus life. As a Division III institution with 23 athletic teams, MSJ champions mental wellness in sports. Its Wellness Center offers no-cost counseling, health services, GROW coaching and inclusive monthly wellness events. Additional supports include Uwill telehealth counseling, a campus food pantry, nonprofit partnerships, and the Zen Den—an on-campus space for rest and mindfulness.



Wellness

The Mount St. Joseph University Wellness Center team supports students and employees with mental and physical health services, while also leading campus-wide events that promote the Eight Dimensions of Wellness and overall well-being.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AWARD

Orvis School of Nursing, University of Nevada, Reno

The Orvis School of Nursing (OSN) is redefining wellness as foundational to academic and professional excellence. Since launching its dedicated wellness program in spring 2025, OSN has introduced free therapy via Uwill, resilience-focused workshops, and inclusive faculty/staff wellness days. As a key partner in the WHEN@UNR initiative, OSN co-hosts Fresh Check Day and has trained QPR-certified suicide prevention instructors to expand its impact across campus. The in-progress Art@Orvis initiative will bring visual art into classrooms and public spaces to promote reflection and healing.

Pikes Peak State College

Pikes Peak State College (PPSC) delivers on wellness with breadth and depth—across basic needs, mental health, and belonging. Through Single Stop, students receive support for food, housing, and finances, while BetterMynd telehealth counseling ensures around-the-clock access to care. PPSC's counseling center offers safe spaces and services tailored to LGBTQIA+, religious, and culturally diverse students. Faculty and staff benefit from flexible schedules, campus wellness workshops, and equity-centered training through its Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

Pratt Institute

Pratt Institute is entering a new chapter in its wellness journey with the opening of its first dedicated Campus Wellness Center in fall 2026. This milestone builds on the 2023 launch of the Resilience, Wellness and Well-Being Center, which offers mindfulness, meditation, and positive growth programming for students, faculty, and staff. Since appointing its first assistant vice president for resilience, wellness, and well-being in 2020, Pratt has advanced its JED Campus work and expanded offerings through the Center for Teaching and Learning and a collaborative HR-staff council initiative.



Goat Yoga

Goat yoga is a popular event each year at Nazareth University. It combines the traditional practice of yoga with pet therapy by introducing baby goats, who are natural jumpers and explorers, to a beginner-level class.



Ramapo College

At Ramapo College, student well-being is embedded into infrastructure and strategic priorities. The Student Wellbeing Core unites counseling, health, residence life, student involvement, and disability services to deliver coordinated, wraparound support. Students access a dedicated Wellness Room with light therapy, yoga mats, a massage chair, and calming activities, alongside pet therapy, wellness fairs, and 24/7 AI support through Rocky, a digital mental health chatbot.

Ringling College of Art and Design

Ringling College of Art and Design is cultivating a wellness culture rooted in creativity, inclusion, and student voice. The campus-wide #ResilientYou initiative features peer-led retreats, artist talks on self-care, therapy dogs, and wellness-centered art projects. Nearly 30% of Ringling students engage with mental health services annually, supported by a CARE team and on-campus therapists. In fall 2025, faculty and staff will gain expanded access to counseling and well-being resources.

Rutgers University, New Brunswick

Rutgers University is redefining access to mental health care with a public health approach that puts affordability, inclusion, and innovation at the forefront. Through its ScarletWell initiative, the university offers comprehensive psychological evaluations for free (with insurance) or at a low cost. Embedded therapists, peer support programs, staff wellness grants, and a 40-member leadership council drive campus-wide impact. Outreach extends beyond the campus through statewide summits, naloxone training, and the Brandt Behavioral Health Treatment Center and Retreat.



Healthy Eating

The Mount Mary Dietetics Department produces a healthy farm-to-table meal for residents of the Trinity Woods intergenerational living complex from locally sourced ingredients.



Multicultural Awareness

Staff and students from the University of Nevada, Reno's Multicultural Center welcome visitors during an event at the Orvis School of Nursing.



Self-Help Guidance

A Pellissippi State Community College staff member hands a book to a participant during a campus event focused on personal and academic growth resources.



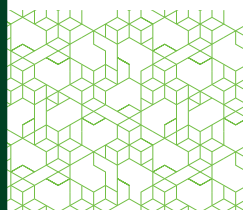
Montgomery County Community College is honored to be recognized for its commitment to wellness and for fostering a caring environment where students and employees are empowered to thrive.



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At Missouri S&T, solving for tomorrow isn't only about scientific discoveries and technological solutions.



We're always striving to support our students as people, not just in the classroom. See how at hwb.mst.edu.



Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Southern Illinois University Carbondale has built a student-centered wellness ecosystem that meets students where they are. The HEROES program provides wraparound support for students experiencing food, housing, or health insecurity, while the CARES Team delivers trauma-informed crisis intervention. Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers over 10,000 sessions annually—double the national average—including long-term therapy and embedded counselors across the campus.

University at Albany, State University of New York

The University at Albany (UAlbany) is a health-promoting powerhouse. Its Middle Earth Peer Program, trauma-informed counseling, and expansive basic needs services reach thousands annually. With one of the nation's largest mental health walks and a new telehealth initiative, UAlbany centers equity and belonging across every layer of campus life.

University of Connecticut

The University of Connecticut has transformed student mental health support through its innovative Student Health and Wellness (SHaW) model. With 150+ full-time staff, SHaW integrates wellness into all aspects of student life—offering a 24/7 support line, well-being coaching, health promotion, and accessible mental health services. The school prioritizes prevention and resilience-building with embedded clinicians, peer-led programming, and a collaborative care model.



Collaboration

Students at Mississippi State University's College of Veterinary Medicine participate in a blindfolded team-building game during orientation.

University of Florida, College of Veterinary Medicine

University of Florida's College of Veterinary Medicine supports mental health through its full-time counselor, peer mentor programs, wellness retreats, and on-site therapy dog. Recognizing the rigorous demands of veterinary training, the college offers confidential, accessible support services and innovative initiatives like "Wellness Wednesday" communications and collaborative workshops on mindfulness, grief, and stress management.

University of New Mexico

University of New Mexico's Student Health and Counseling (SHAC) is a statewide leader in culturally responsive mental health care. Serving one of the nation's largest Native American student populations, SHAC offers walk-in crisis services, 24/7 telehealth, and targeted outreach for marginalized communities. Initiatives like the Lobo Wellbeing program, Collegiate Recovery Center, and the LoboOasis wellness room provide creative, accessible care. From vending machine health kits to sleep pods and peer mentoring, SHAC meets students where they are—ensuring health equity, dignity, and culturally affirming support.



Basic Needs

A student selects toiletries from the HEROES Basic Needs Resource Center at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.



Connecting With Nature

Pellissippi State Community College students and staff pause for a group photo during an outdoor nature hike.



Animal Therapy

At Miami University, the Student Counseling Service offers drop-in Horse Therapy and Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy in partnership with their Equestrian Center.



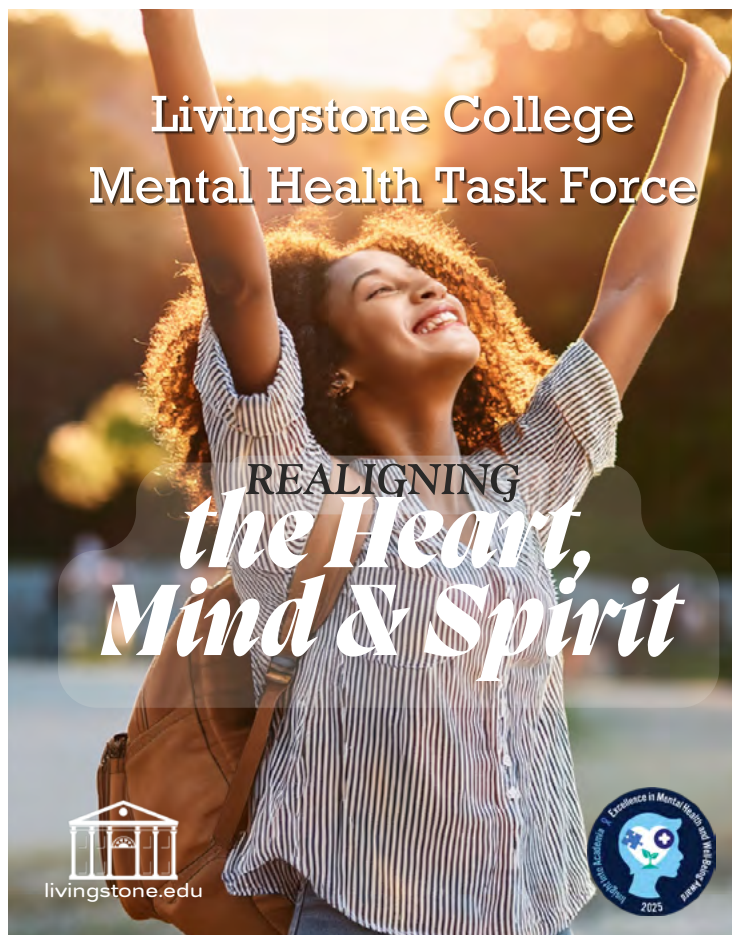
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Livingstone College Mental Health Task Force

REALIGNING the Heart, Mind & Spirit



livingstone.edu





University of Richmond

The University of Richmond has created a campus ecosystem where well-being is embedded in every layer of student, staff, and faculty life. With a centralized Well-Being Center, required wellness courses (WELL 100/102), and initiatives like SpiderSafe and URWell Peer Educators, the school blends trauma-informed care with proactive outreach. The university empowers students through identity-affirming programs and equips faculty and staff with resources ranging from massage therapy to leadership retreats.

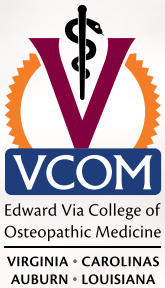
Wichita State University

Wichita State University has built a culture of well-being through its award-winning Suspender4Hope program, peer-driven Hope Kits, and a seamless network of clinical and non-clinical services. The Student Wellness Center—co-located with a YMCA—integrates physical, emotional, and academic care under one roof. CAPS offers timely, evidence-based therapy with no session limits, while HOPE Services leads stigma-reducing campaigns and suicide prevention efforts.



Leadership

Mississippi State University College of Veterinary Medicine Leadership and Wellness Conference



Mental Health IS AT THE HEART OF THE VCOM Family

At the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine (VCOM), we believe that caring for future physicians means caring for the whole person. That's why we prioritize mental health through counseling, wellness programs, and a community that looks out for one another—because when students feel supported, they're better prepared to care for others.



Learn more at
www.vcom.edu



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“We endeavor for all Spiders to thrive at our University and beyond and to live lives of purpose.” — University of Richmond Strategic Plan

THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND IS A PROUD RECIPIENT OF THE
2025 Excellence in Mental Health and Well-Being Award.



BEYOND^{the}QUAD^{cast}

Real Conversations. Real Change.

This week, we're spotlighting a bold, systems-level effort that's reshaping the future of Black higher education—not just one campus at a time, but across an entire ecosystem.

In this episode of Beyond the Quadcast, *Insight* sits down with **three powerhouse changemakers from the United Negro College Fund's (UNCF) Institute for Capacity Building.**

From capacity building and trust-centered leadership to shared services, endowment reform, and the ACT Framework (Authenticity, Compassion, Transparency), this episode explores how transformation becomes real, sustainable, and scalable.

You'll also get a behind-the-scenes look at UNITE, the annual summit that's more than just a conference—it's part think tank, part family reunion, and all-in on action. Find out how ideas born at UNITE are turning into funded initiatives, cross-campus collaborations, and long-term change.

"We don't believe in one-off wins," says Dr. Sharp-Deas. "We're building collective power, because when one HBCU thrives, we all rise."

UNCF GUESTS



Rev. Dr. Darryl Ann Lai Fang

Assistant Vice President of Transformation Support and a U.S. Air Force veteran bringing military precision and emotional intelligence to higher ed change



Julian Thompson

Senior Director of Strategy Development, guiding initiatives on student mental health, endowment growth, and policy innovation



Dr. Kendra Sharp-Deas

Strategist for UNCF's Institute for Capacity Building, leading transformative work in student success, fundraising, and institutional growth



Stream this episode and more, and sign up to receive *Insight's* newsletter **BEYOND^{the}QUAD** to be notified when new episodes are available.

