

BACKGROUND

- Several public health measures were implemented to prevent widespread transmission of COVID-19, including social distancing policies enforced across colleges and universities.
- From mid-Fall 2020 to early Spring 2021, universities began resuming some in-person activities. Several studies have examined the negative impact of campus closures on colleges and university members<sup>1</sup> and, in 2022, college students reported a significant increase in mental health distress.<sup>2</sup> Yet, no research has examined the resources needed to assist students and faculty/staff as return to in-person activities.
- The current study examined: (1) the resources university members (undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty/staff) wanted to assist their transition back to in-person activities, (2) their access to these specific resources, and (3) differences in access to resources among various demographic groups, including those from minoritized backgrounds.

METHOD

- Study was conducted as a part of a *Garrett Lee Smith Campus Suicide Prevention Grant*, which examined aspects of university students’ health and well-being.
- A cross-sectional and anonymous online survey was completed in April 2021 by a random sample of 471 university members: 219 undergraduates, 91 graduate students, and 161 faculty/staff.
- Survey included a series of demographic questions, validated questionnaires of mental health symptoms, and a novel *Wants and Access* Questionnaire that was customized to gauge wants and access to campus and community resources. This questionnaire included 11 questions in four categories: health resources, interpersonal support, social support, and campus resources. Participants also had the opportunity to “write in” any additional resources they deemed necessary.
- Descriptive, chi-square/fisher’s exact test, and thematic analyses were used to analyze the data.

RESULTS

Undergraduates (Age: *M*=22.8, *SD*=6.4)

Resources	Resources Wanted	Resources Accessible (out of those who wanted resources)
Financial support	57.7%	35.0% <sup>a</sup>
Support from friends outside of university	55.4%	60.7%
Support from romantic partners	51.6%	61.5% <sup>b</sup>
Support from mental health professionals outside of university	48.1%	35.3%
Support from medical professionals	47.4%	48.0%

Lowest Access

Reported access

Support from campus counseling services	26.5% <sup>c</sup>
Support from university services and staff	30.3% <sup>d</sup>

a) Access was significantly lower among LGBQ+ (22.7%), compared to undergraduates who identified as heterosexual (*p*=.008).

b) Access was significantly different for White (70.2%), Black (29.2%), and other students of color (57.6%, *p* <.001). When further examined between racial subgroups, significantly lower access was noted among Black students compared to White students (*p* <.001), and other students of color (*p* = .033).

c) Access was significantly lower among LGBQ+ (9.8%), compared to heterosexual-identifying students (35.3%; *p* = .003).

d) Access was significantly lower among LGBQ+ (16.3%) compared to heterosexual-identifying students (37.5%; *p* = .009).

Graduate Students (Age: *M*=33.8, *SD*=9.8)

Resources	Resources Wanted	Resources Accessible (out of those who wanted resources)
Support from romantic partners	60.6%	75.3%
Support from friends outside of university	59.1%	61.3%
Support from family members	56.7%	76.4%
Financial support	53.5%	49.3%
Support from mental health professionals outside of university	47.2%	50.0%

Lowest Access

Reported access

Support from the social community on campus	25.0%
Support from the university campus counseling services	31.1% <sup>e,f</sup>

e) Access was significantly lower for females(13.8%) compared to male graduate students (57.1%; *p* =.009).

f) Access was significantly different for White (15.0%), Black (22.2%), and other students of color (56.0%; *p* =.028). When further examined between racial subgroups, only White and other students of color were significantly different (*p* =.014).

Faculty (Age: *M*=49.5, *SD*=12.2)

Resources	Resources Wanted	Resources Accessible (out of those who wanted resources)
Support from friends outside of university	64.3%	73.0% <sup>g</sup>
Support from romantic partners	59.2%	85.7%
Support from family members	59.2%	88.9% <sup>h</sup>
Support from friends at the university	55.4%	64.4%
Support from medical professionals	48.8%	78.9%

Lowest Access

Reported access

Support from the social community on campus	39.2% <sup>i</sup>
Support from university services and staff	43.8%

g) Access was significantly lower among LGBQ+ (52.6%), compared to heterosexual-identifying faculty/staff (76.7%; *p* = .028).

h) Access was significantly lower among LGBQ+ (68.8%), compared to heterosexual-identifying faculty/staff (96.8%; *p* =.018).

i) Access was significantly lower among females (29.4%) compared to male faculty/staff (62.5%; *p* = .026).

RESULTS (Cont..)

- Free responses: 100 participants (41 undergraduates, 10 graduate students, 49 faculty/staff) wrote in additional desired resources (not listed in the survey).

Undergraduate Students

Theme 1: Additional mental health resources (i.e., emotional support animals, resources to address stigma, additional availability for counseling [more counselors, online options])

Theme 2: More on-campus social activities (i.e., social events, group activities)

Faculty/Staff

Theme 1: Work flexibility (i.e., flexible work hours, hybrid options)

Theme 2: Mental health resources (i.e., mental health workshops/support groups, mental health breaks/time, on-campus counseling for faculty/staff)

Theme 3: Measures to ensure safety and vaccination protocols are followed (e.g., mandatory vaccination of students, updating COVID-related safety protocols)

Note: No themes emerged for graduate students.

DISCUSSION

- Overall, undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty/staff reported unique needs to support them, but many, particularly undergraduates, reported limited access to these resources.
- In several instances, minoritized groups (LGBQ+ and people of color) reported lower access to resources.
- The current study points to disparities in resource categories that may guide college/university priorities.
- The study also recognizes a need to reevaluate the resources available within the higher education system to assist each group following an unprecedented pandemic.

SELECTED REFERENCES

- Sahu, P. (2020). Closure of universities due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): impact on education and mental health of students and academic staff. *Cureus*, 12(4).
- American College Health Association. (2022). Undergraduate student reference group executive summary.

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