Risk Alert
Meaningful. Actionable. Timely

November 14, 2023

Mental Health of Students and Employees

The increasing prevalence of mental health incidents among students and employees in higher education institutions poses a significant risk to the overall well-being of the campus community. Factors such as academic pressure, societal expectations, and the evolving challenges of the modern world contribute to a heightened vulnerability. Failure to proactively address and support mental health concerns may result in diminished academic performance, decreased job satisfaction, and potentially severe consequences for the affected individuals and the institution's reputation.

The Impact Mental Health has on FAMU's Strategic Plan: Boldly Striking

Managing student mental health is a linchpin for the success of Strategic Priority One, Student Success in the 2022-2027 Boldly Striking Strategic Plan. The mental well-being of students profoundly impacts their overall experience at the university, influencing factors critical to this strategic goal. For instance, a robust mental health support system contributes significantly to student retention by addressing challenges that may hinder academic progress. Students facing mental health issues, if adequately supported, are more likely to persist in their studies, leading to higher retention rates. Moreover, a positive mental health environment enhances the overall quality of the student experience, making the university an attractive choice for talented students. When students feel supported in their mental well-being, they are more likely to engage in academic and extracurricular activities, contributing to a vibrant and thriving campus community. This positive experience becomes a compelling factor in positioning FAMU as an institution of choice for students both within Florida and beyond.

Ensuring the mental well-being of our faculty is a pivotal factor in achieving the goals outlined in Strategic Priority Two, Academic Excellence. Attaining Carnegie Classification of Research 1 (R1) status necessitates a culture of sustained excellence, including the well-being of our academic community. For example, a robust mental health support system contributes to the professional development of faculty and researchers by fostering an environment where innovation and scholarship thrive. When our academic community feels supported in their mental health, they are better positioned to engage in cutting-edge research, resulting in a more vibrant intellectual atmosphere that aligns with our commitment to health, innovative research, and scholarship, ultimately propelling us towards the desired Carnegie Classification and enhancing our degree production across strategic programs.
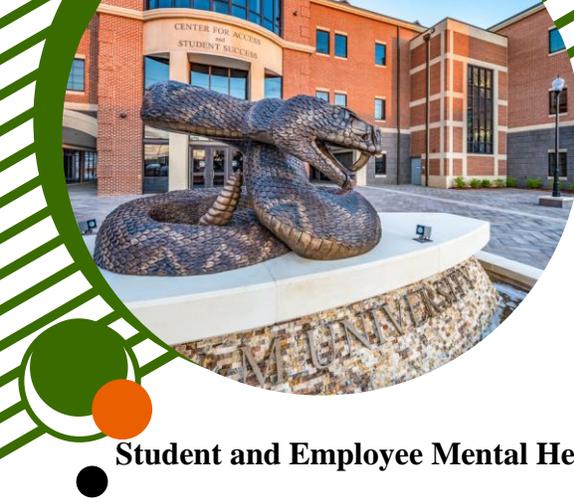
Alert Type **Awareness** **Watch** **Warning**

"In response to the escalating prevalence of mental health incidents among students and employees, strong measures must be implemented to fortify support services, enhance training for recognition and response, and foster a campus culture that prioritizes mental well-being to mitigate the risk of adverse academic and organizational outcomes."

— FAMU Chief Risk Officer Deidre Melton

Student and Employee Mental Health Risk Mitigation Strategies for Management Consideration:

1. **Expand Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams:** Broaden the scope of threat assessment teams to include both staff and students, addressing potential risks early on.

2. **Regular Background Checks:** Implement a routine background check schedule for all staff members, ensuring ongoing safety and security.

3. **Hire a Chief Wellness Officer:** Appoint a dedicated professional to oversee and lead mental health and wellness initiatives within the institution.

4. **Provide Training on Recognizing Signs and Response:** Conduct annual or biannual training for staff to recognize signs of mental health issues and respond effectively.

5. **Develop Metrics for Monitoring:** Establish measurable metrics to monitor the effectiveness of mental health programs and interventions.

6. **Conduct Third-Party Assessment:** Periodically engage third-party assessments to evaluate the mental health landscape, identifying areas for improvement.

7. **Evaluate Environmental Factors:** Assess environmental factors impacting mental health for both students and staff, and create action plans to address identified issues.

8. **Regular Communication of Resources:** Send regular communications to staff and students, informing them of available mental health resources and support services.

9. **Engage Student Organizations:** Collaborate with student organizations to promote awareness of mental health services and encourage a culture that destigmatizes seeking help.

10. **Implement Stress Reduction Programs:** Introduce stress reduction programs and workshops for both students and staff to equip them with coping mechanisms and resilience-building skills.

11. **Enhance Accessibility of Counseling Services:** Ensure that counseling services are easily accessible, both in-person and virtually, to accommodate the diverse needs and preferences of the campus community.

12. **Promote Work-Life Balance Initiatives:** Encourage a healthy work-life balance by implementing policies that support flexible schedules, time off, and other initiatives that contribute to overall well-being.

13. **Establish Peer Support Networks:** Develop peer support networks among both students and staff, fostering a sense of community and providing a supportive environment for sharing experiences and challenges.