

DATE: 7 April 2016

TO: Columbia Spectator, ESC Executive Board Elect, CCSC Vice President of Policy Elect

FROM: Sidney Perkins, ESC Vice President of Policy Elect

SUBJECT: Policy Memorandum on Mental Health

Among other things, the ESC policy committee for the academic year of 2016 – 2017 shall champion the advancement of mental health on Columbia's campus.

There are many issues concerning mental health at Columbia, which is well evidenced by the quantitative results of large-scale data collection projects such as the Senate's *Quality of Life Survey*. Below is a list of policy initiatives that address these issues of mental health. These objectives are meant to be implemented as a package serving as a multi-pronged approach to a complex problem.

Despite the breadth of the suggestions below, they are meant by no means to be comprehensive solutions. To complement these approaches, the ESC Policy Committee will collaborate with organizations such as the Mental Health Task Force, the Center for Psychological Services, the Peer Health Exchange, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Office of Undergraduate Student Life, Columbia Housing, the Center for Student Advising, Columbia Facilities, the Office of the Engineering Dean, and the Committee on Instruction. The ultimate aim is to address issues of mental health on all levels in all aspects of life at Columbia.

Finally, to identify future policy, additional data will need to be collected.

1. **Health Policy:** *all health policy should be aligned with ensuring that students interface well with and within the Columbia community.*
  - a. Students returning from medical leaves of absence should be guaranteed housing.
  - b. Students returning from medical leaves of absence should be able to meet with physicians locally to determine whether or not they are able to re-matriculate (they should not be required to fly to New York).
  - c. CPS's hours should be extended to encompass 24 hr support.
  - d. Students who are experiencing acute mental trauma/duress should not be penalized on grading for turning in homework late.
  - e. All policies need (1) to be drafted and implemented on a campus-wide level AND (2) to be clarified for instructors.
2. **Academics:** *professors should be informed of best practices for mental health and mindfulness in order to support their students. Students should also be aware of these best practices and informed of current Columbia policy so that they have recourse if ever treated unfairly for their state of mental health.*
  - a. Support the Mental Health Task Force's initiative to develop a mental health awareness training program for professors.

- b. Students will be informed of the rules that professors follow related to mental health so that everyone is on the same page. This can take place as one aspect of the proposed NSOP Mental Health Training Program elaborated upon below.
3. **New Student Orientation Program:** *NSOP mental health and mindfulness training currently does not exist to the extent that it should. NSOP offers the perfect chance to connect with new students over mental health, inform them of what current policy looks like, and provide them with the resources that they need to be happy, healthy, and productive.*
  - a. Currently, mental health is addressed briefly during Under1Roof sessions and during a play . We will look into the possibility of creating separate programming specifically focused on mental health and mindfulness at Columbia.
4. **Engaging Student Groups:** *extensive research has been done by peer institutions to show the benefit of pre-orientation programs on student wellness and success. Columbia has several wonderful programs that currently exist on campus. In addition, Columbia has several well-informed student groups that will be used to help draft future mental health policy.*
  - a. Increase funding for organizations such as the Columbia Outdoor Orientation Program and the Columbia Urban Experience, which offer communities on campus that help to ease the stressful transition from high school to college.
  - b. Work with the Peer Health Exchange and the Mental Health Task Force to help develop more policy initiatives.
5. **Low-Stress Space:** *there is a direct link between how a space is designed and used and how it makes a person inhabiting that space feel. The fact that student spaces within Columbia should not contribute to students stress is the guiding principle for ESC Policy's space initiatives.*
  - a. There are ongoing renovations happening for Café 212. We will advocate for the provision of a pool, foosball, or air hockey table to be installed.
  - b. Lawn space should be kept open longer. Target dates should be identified for lawn opening and closing.
  - c. Pinpoint facilities projects that can increase accessibility. For example: add a side entrance to Mathematics that is wheel chair accessible.