



## Latest Online Screening Results Give Counselors Insight Into College Mental Health

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### Christina Collins

*Christina Collins is part of the communications team at Screening for Mental Health, Inc., a non-profit in Wellesley, MA, that provides nationwide programs for mental health education and screening.*

#### What is this?

During the 2008-2009 school year, more than 60,300 U.S. college students screened themselves for depression through the *CollegeResponse*® online screening program. 53% scored “likely” for the presence of depression, while another 27% scored “very likely.” In addition, 43,500 students screened themselves for generalized anxiety disorder; 85% of those students scored positive.

For college counselors and psychologists, these numbers can provide essential information to help them better address the mental and emotional health needs of their students. A student’s unhappiness is not quantitative, and screening results do not serve as an official diagnosis—they simply serve to identify symptoms of a disorder—but the results can provide insight into which issues may need particular attention on campus.

Eating disorders, for instance, are prominent among the college-aged population. Through *CollegeResponse*, approximately 17,500 students screened themselves for eating disorders in the 2008-2009 school year, and nearly 1,100 students—40% of the males screened and 66% of the females—scored positive. Shockingly, less than 4% of these students were in treatment for an eating disorder at the time of the screening. This information also reinforces another important fact: only a small fraction of those who need help actually seek help. Social stigma, confusion, and lack of knowledge of available resources keep many from reaching out.

When most students are reluctant to confront mental and emotional health problems, it is a challenge for colleges and universities to get the data needed to understand their students’ needs and encourage them to receive help. Fortunately, one approach that has proven effective for hundreds of colleges is to offer anonymous online mental health and alcohol screenings.

“An online screening program takes advantage of this generation’s preference for the Web,” said Douglas G. Jacobs, M.D., Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry Professor at Harvard Medical School and founder of the non-profit Screening for Mental Health, Inc. “It offers a familiar, nonthreatening way for students to assess their mental well-being and recognize their potential need for help so that they can take the first step toward recovering.” Jacobs refers specifically to the *CollegeResponse* online

screening program, which aims to identify students at risk for mood, anxiety, alcohol use, and eating disorders through anonymous self-assessments.

Whether the cause is personal trauma, everyday pressures, or hereditary factors, mental health issues are rising among college students. Fortunately, the use of online screenings is rising too. During the 2008-2009 school year, more than 700 colleges and universities participated in *CollegeResponse*. More colleges are registering for this year's new online module, which now offers screenings for six different types of disorders and features a guide-me section that helps students determine which screening to take based on how they have been feeling.

To register for the 2009/2010 program or to view a demo of the new online screening, call (781) 239-0071 or visit [www.mentalhealthscreening.org/college](http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/college).

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