Convention Presentation Summaries

Each year, CCAPS sponsors several programs for continuing education credits for psychologists. At this year's convention in Las Vegas, we sponsored 28 programs. If you couldn't make all the programs you wanted to attend or weren't able to attend the convention this year, you can still find out more about some of the quality presentations that were sponsored. Below are descriptions of several presentations from this year's convention.

Gaining Ground on Mental Health Help-Seeking Behaviors: A BGSU Perspective

Laura Saavedra & Ellen Broido

Recently, Bowling Green State University (BGSU) has seen a frightening rise in suicide ideation and suicide attempts amongst its undergraduate student body. This session reported key findings from an assessment of mental health help-seeking behaviors and coping strategies among BGSU undergraduate students. We also discussed how we can use this research to inform practice and develop programs, interventions, and services in various functional areas at our institutions.

According to an ACHA-National College Health Assessment, of the millions of students enrolled in institutions of higher education across the nation, a great many report feeling stressed and overwhelmed by school, engaging in maladaptive coping behaviors, and experiencing depression during their undergraduate education (Eisenbarth, 2012). Research has identified common themes supporting this claim. According to Mowbray et al. (2006), many students experience their first psychiatric episode while at college, and 12%–18% of students have a diagnosable mental illness. "Although student mental health is of particular concern to student affairs and counseling center staff who work closely with students to facilitate their growth and development, the entire institution has, according to Stanley & Manthorpe, a 'role in prevention, providing support, and in offering a range of opportunities to enable students to participate in higher education'." (Kitzrow, 2009). It follows, then, that quality college mental health services must be a priority for all post-secondary institutions.

There is evidence that college counseling centers may be dealing with students with suicidal ideation and potential suicide attempts in nearly one out of every two cases they see (Mowbray et al., 2006). Just last year, Bowling Green State University (BGSU) saw a rise in suicide ideation and suicide attempts amongst their undergraduate student body. In an effort to gain greater awareness of current student mental health needs in a non-traditional way, I administered an assessment of undergraduate student help-seeking behaviors and coping mechanisms. Discussion of mental health issues as well as what people have done to cope can increase the normalization of having a mental health issue and increase the perceived norm of asking for help (Vogel et al., 2007). Chao (2011) found that avoidant coping may also serve as an important source of information about college students' well-being. Coping theorists have long argued that in addition to relying on social support to manage stress, students sometimes use avoidant coping. Thus, through the assessment in this study, I attempt to discover what the most frequent coping strategies are among students.

I chose to evaluate willingness to seek help as one way of measuring environmental wellness efforts at this institution. Thus, I did not specifically focus on students exhibiting help-seeking behavior; I also studied those students potentially having a need but not seeking help. The counseling center does an extensive job in collecting "local" data from clients on individual campuses, however, samples of students who don't come to counseling centers need to be investigated to examine similarities and differences between clinical (those who seek treatment) and non-clinical populations (Soet & Sevig, 2006). Ultimately, the purpose of this program is to help participants understand how students identify the signs and symptoms of emotional distress and the possible contemplation of suicide, as well as the impact of stigma on preventing effective

acknowledgement and utilization of mental health services. Lastly, participants also learned how to use our methodology to assess their students' and create a plan of action to help address mental health help-seeking behaviors among undergraduate students on their own campus.

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