

ECB 2017-01

Committee: Executive Council
First Reading Date: 30 August 2016
Second Reading Date: DD MONTH YYYY
Final Action Date: DD MONTH YYYY
Final Action: PASSED/FAILED

Addressing the Mental Health Crisis at Utah State University

Description: This bill declares a mental health crisis at Utah State University and discusses efforts to combat the negative effects of mental health issues of the student body.

WHEREAS mental health issues are currently negatively affecting students across the nation;

WHEREAS according to a 2015 study of 19,861 college students, conducted by the American College Health Association (ACHA), 14% of students had seriously considered suicide in the past two weeks[i];

WHEREAS according to the same ACHA 2015 study, 43.2% of students (n = 19,861) reported never having receiving information from their school about anxiety and depression--despite 53.2% of these students being interested in receiving this information;

WHEREAS mental illness corresponds with higher dropout rates, lower GPA, and an increase in mortality rates[ii];

WHEREAS Utah has one of the highest suicide rates in the United States[iii];

WHEREAS each of the higher education institutions in the state of Utah have students that are affected by mental health issues;

WHEREAS over one-hundred students enrolled in Utah higher education institutions in the 2014-2015 school year attempted suicide;

WHEREAS fifteen of those suicide attempts were completed;

WHEREAS one in four students have considered, or are considering, suicide;

WHEREAS the well-being of many students at Utah State University is in jeopardy due to mental health issues;

WHEREAS the mental health of the Utah State University student body has been a significant cause for concern due to multiple tragedies occurring each year – including suicides and attempted suicides;

WHEREAS currently many students are unable to receive the proper treatment they need from university-sponsored services such as the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) due to waitlists;

WHEREAS during the school year there is a four to six week average wait to take advantage of these services at Utah State University;

WHEREAS CAPS needs additional funding from the state to cut down the wait time;

WHEREAS the Utah State University Student Association plans to address the mental health crisis proactively;

WHEREAS the Utah State University Student Association has long since made it a priority to provide for the well-being of the student body;

BE IT THEREFORE ENACTED THAT the Utah State University Student Association declare a mental health crisis at Utah State University.

WHEREAS the Utah Student Association (USA) is comprised of the student body presidents for each of the institutions of higher education in Utah;

WHEREAS the Utah Student Association plans to pursue legislation at the Utah State Legislature during the 2017 legislative session to help curtail this problem;

WHEREAS the Government Relations Council is a branch of the Utah State University Student Association that advocates for student interests to governments at the city, county, and state levels;

BE IT THEREFORE ENACTED that the Utah State University Student Association support legislative action proposed by the Utah Student Association and provide the Government Relations Council the responsibility of advocating for legislation that directly addresses mental health issues to the Utah State Legislature in the 2017 legislative session.

WHEREAS many USUSA student officers have personally seen or experienced mental health issues;

WHEREAS the Utah State University Student Association does not want to see another suicide at Utah State University;

BE IT FURTHER ENACTED that the mental health crisis at Utah State University be considered a pressing issue and given priority during the 2016-2017 Utah State University Student Association term.

Tags: Mental Health Crisis, CAPS, Utah, Utah State University, USUSA, suicide, depression, GRC

Sponsor: Matthew Clewett, USUSA Student Advocate Vice President

Co-Sponsors: Ty Aller, USUSA Graduate Studies Senator; Ashley Waddoups, USUSA Student Body President; Brenna Kelly, USUSA Public Relations and Marketing Director; Molly R. Van Engelenhoven, USUSA Natural Resources Senator; Nadir Tekarli, USUSA Business Senator; Joseph Day, USUSA Science Senator; Jacie Rex, USUSA CHaSS Senator; Rachael Fresh, USUSA Student Alumni Vice President; Luis Armenta, USUSA Organizations and Campus Diversity Vice President; Todd Brown, USUSA Service Vice President; Ryan Jensen, USUSA Student Events Vice President

**ECB 2017-01 Addressing the Mental Health Crisis at Utah State University
Policy Paper**

Committee:

In Attendance:

Absent:

History:

Over the past ten years, college campuses across the nation have experienced an increase in mental health issues facing their students. In 2015, the American College Health Association reported that 14% of students had seriously considered suicide in the past two weeks^[iv]. Additionally, of the 19,861 students surveyed, 43.2% of the students reported they had never received information from their school about anxiety or depression -- despite 53.2% of those surveyed stating they were interested in receiving this information.

In the 2014-2015 school year, over one-hundred students in the Utah System of Higher Education attempted to commit suicide. Tragically, fifteen were completed. In Utah, one out of every four higher education students considered taking their life. Over the past two years, the

Utah State University Student Association (USUSA) has sponsored mental health awareness campaigns to promote awareness of the problems students at Utah State University (USU) and throughout the state of Utah face daily.

Despite these campaign efforts, many of the services universities provide to combat mental health problems are overbooked, understaffed, and underfunded. This does not exclude Utah State University. USU Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) has an average waitlist of four to six weeks for new students to receive services. Additionally, at the USU Health and Wellness Center mental health issues (i.e., anxiety, depression, ADHD) are the number one and number two diagnoses; representing one in five students seeking services [MC1] within the last year.

Purpose:

The purpose of this bill is to address the issue of mental health at Utah State University. This will be accomplished by drawing attention to mental health issues on campus by passing a legislative bill declaring mental health issues a crisis on the USU campus; working collaboratively with the Utah Student Association to pass legislation across all the Utah System of Higher Education schools to advocate for mental health awareness and increased services; and coordinating efforts with the Government Relations Council of USU to lobby both local and state elected officials for increased services from the state legislature.

Pros:

- Will make the issue of mental health a priority in the 2016-2017 session
- Will attract attention from media and other student organizations
- With the proper planning and execution, the USUSA can work with other Utah student governments to pass similar pieces of legislation

- Will provide a large talking point for lobbying efforts of the GRC, allowing legislators to be more receptive

Cons:

- Adds another responsibility to the GRC
- May not reach as many students and/or groups as planned
- Declaring a crisis does not have any enforcing power
- Could receive negative pushback from university administration

[i] American College Health Association (2015). National Health Assessment. Retrieved from: http://www.acha-ncha.org/docs/NCHA-II_FALL_2015_REFERENCE_GROUP_DATA_REPORT.pdf

[ii] Eisenberg, D., Golberstein, E., & Hunt, J. B. (2009). Mental health and academic success in college. *The BE Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, 9(1).

[iii] Utah Department of Health (2015). Utah's Public Health Data Resource. Retrieved from: https://ibis.health.utah.gov/indicator/complete_profile/SuicDth.html

[iv] American College Health Association (2015). National Health Assessment. Retrieved from: http://www.acha-ncha.org/docs/NCHA-II_FALL_2015_REFERENCE_GROUP_DATA_REPORT.pdf

[MC1]Insert "56% of their top eight diagnoses"