

Creating a More Inclusive Community: Understanding Mental Health Impediments for Undergraduate Students

A Mellon Foundation Inclusive Teaching Grant Proposal
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Overview

In conversations with Trinity faculty and administrators, we have observed anecdotal evidence of confusion around meeting the unique needs of students with temporary or ongoing mental health challenges. A common theme among faculty is our lack of training with regard to supporting students' mental health needs. With an increase in students with mental health conditions, we are especially interested in helping our colleagues gain the skills to better address the unique needs of our student body in terms of mental health. The objective of our proposal is to better understand the concerns of Trinity faculty, the needs of Trinity students, and run a spring 2021 workshop on best practices for our colleagues.

Proposed Project

To prepare for our spring 2021 faculty workshop we intend to consult the scholarly research on the topic of supporting undergraduate students with mental health conditions, conduct a site visit to a school that is recognized for doing this particularly well, and to collect data from Trinity faculty and students in order to identify areas in need of improvement within our community.

First, we intend to share information on how other colleges and universities are training faculty to better meet the mental health needs of students. We recently discovered a report on the colleges and universities with the best universal design programs. Our plan, after reviewing these data, is to schedule a visit to one of these institutions to meet with faculty staff and learn about best practices. Provided our proposal is accepted by the Mellon committee, we will request travel funding through the Faculty Professional Development Fund available through the Dean of Faculty's Office. We have also identified several academic conferences with programming related to college student mental health (ACHA, NASPA, Active Minds) and would propose attending at least one of these as an additional way of learning about new trends in the field.

Finally, we intend to create five-minute Qualtrics surveys for both Trinity faculty and students. The faculty survey will help us identify the questions our colleagues have about working with students with mental health issues. The student survey, in addition to consulting with experts here on campus, such as Lori Clapis, at the Student Accessibility Resource Center, as well as Kristine Kennen and Randy Lee at the counseling center, will allow us understand the faculty-student interaction from the student perspective. The survey will be administered to all students, but there will be specific questions that students with mental health conditions can choose to answer about interactions with faculty and how their unique accommodations have been addressed. Analyzing the results of these surveys will help us identify areas for the faculty workshop on addressing the needs of students with mental health challenges. Survey results from our faculty and student Qualtrics surveys will also be shared with workshop participants.