

*They are going through something,
while at the same time going through college.*

***Listening to
Students with Personal Struggles...***

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**Listening to
Students with Personal Struggles**

“I have never been away from home before until now. Homesickness means you actually do feel sick and miss everything back home. I wonder if it goes away soon or should I just quit.

On the positive side, many people are very nice here.”

—18

“There are a lot of people, but not a big sense of community.”

—depressed

“It is very difficult because college is in my opinion a very high pressure environment.

Going to CAPS helped me to have someone to discuss my anxiety with.”

—anxious

“It definitely makes me feel isolated. Most people I see are bright, outgoing, and with a large group of friends. I am none of these things.

I have been excluded from groups that I potentially would be interest in joining. This is not just groups of friends. I also tried to join a Greek organization but due to my mental state at the time (I was especially depressed at the time), I was turned away.

(I like that) I just feel so grateful to have the ability to get a higher education at all.

(I don't like that) I don't feel I belong here. My first semester has been miserable. I have so much school work in comparison to the few friends I have made here and the stress has been affecting me. That said, my condition has also made me feel isolated.”

—depressed

“I would like to have a couple support groups who understand what I'm going through.... I want to be able to connect with my professors and gain social bonds with them. I want to get the hang of college life and not feel like I'm drowning....”

—New to college, mixed, 18, female, living at home & joined a sorority

“I suffered from a relationship ending badly. I can't stop thinking about it. I barely make it to class or work. My friends don't bother asking any more to see if I want to go hang out.”

—male, 20, white

“Its very difficult. Sometimes, I feel like I don’t fit in, even when I try so hard. I feel lost alot, mentally and socially I seem to hide a lot of things, things like stress from college, work, and home family problems.

I would like to consult my problems with the health clinic, but I am too afraid to, I don’t want to be tracked.”

—I am 19 years old female, and my background is from Pakistan. First generation college student, and low income. Challenges, sometimes, not know who to meet with, if I need help, struggling with psychological/mental depression from time to time.

“One of my professors should not be teaching. He sucks, but he’s retiring. I’m a usual straight A student & I’m failing his class. First ‘F’ grade my entire academic career. I’m stressing so much, my hair is falling out. There should be more resources available or at least students should be able to find resources better for those who need professional help.”

—White, mix female 23 y/o

“Well right now I am in a huge disagreement with my roommates. My living situation is unbearable. They are bullies and made the past few months miserable and scary. I don’t know what to do or where to find a new place. Midterms are coming and I should be worrying about that but I keep stressing about everything else instead.”

—sophomore, mixed, 19

“Gets overwhelming at times.

I went through something difficult and when I e-mailed my professors of my hardship they were all so understanding.”

—Female and has anxiety

“My dorm situation is stressing me out.”

—19

“I feel like at my age and with the number of college classes I have taken I should have been done with school by now. I have failed a lot of my classes, and have not put fourth my best efforts. I feel un-motivated and depressed when I am here, especially because my fellow classmates are on better track than myself.

I have only been attending this university for a couple semesters now, and I feel like my perspective doesn’t affect my experiences here. This is all internal and psychological within myself. Nothing to complain about. (Honestly)”

—Behind.

“Because I’m a somewhat older returning student, I don’t really participate in much. I feel like I’ve kind of done a lot of college type stuff already & now I’m just trying to get it done.

I tend to show up for my classes and don’t spend extra time on campus. I haven’t really been apart of campus atmosphere. ☹ I’m a shitty hornet.”

—anxiety filled, depressed returning student, Caucasian, female, 24, straight

“Difficult.”

—anxious

“I have no home right now but most nights I can stay at a friends house unless her boyfriend comes over so I leave. Then its scary being on your own with no place to go at night.”

—female, 19, 2nd year

“I had difficulty accessing the student psychological counseling services—the doctors are rather unavailable.”

—No student specifics given

“My dad’s had cancer for about two years. It went from stage two to stage three, and the only cure is really expensive. So to help with money to give to him, I’ve been living in my car. I sleep in it, make breakfast, everything. It’s been difficult. Food is hard, too. I’ve lost a lot of weight.

I am usually in the parking structure sleeping at night, and get woken up by security who ask me to move, and then I have to go somewhere else, like in the hood, to park. I’ve noticed I’m not the only one either, I’ve seen 15 to 20 other students doing the same thing. I worked at a restaurant for the past few years, and then recently got pneumonia (probably from sleeping in the car). Even though I had a medical note from my doctor, they put me on indefinite suspension.”

—multiple disabilities

“I have encountered only one big challenge on campus. I was belittled by a certain staff member. I tried to go through different sources to notify someone about the situation. I was told that it was a miss understanding, which in my case wasn’t true. I was traumatized + it affected my semester. I went into counseling at the well to get better. I told myself that before I graduate I will find a way to expose this department for hiding my situation.

I felt I was discriminated on by this certain person. I could not find the right people to talk too. I had very little information that I found on CSUS website.... Just not being informed properly about sensitive issues.

Speaking to my professors has been the most positive part of my experience here at Sac State.”

—Female, Filipino, Older

“As a foster kid, you are all alone. You feel that weight, knowing that it’s all on you, and that emptiness. You are very thankful for the support and help you receive.”

—19, white, second year

“I lost my job. I don’t know what to do about rent, school, anything, its very stressful not only because of the money aspect. I really liked the people I worked with it feels like I lost them too.”

—24

“I struggle with low self-esteem. Its always that part of me telling me that I am not good enough and never will be.”

—19

“Eating disorder, sometimes self-cutting. Nothing works to stop it.”

—No student specifics given

“I hate Sac State. Too compact, can’t get a parking spot, I hate the morning commute. Teachers have no passion, I think because of the strike coming up. I feel like I’m treated like a child who needs a middle school hall pass because of attendance policies. I work full time, my mom is terminal and I am grieving. I was in class one day and the teacher looked at me crying and said ‘you need to stay.’ I still had to attend class and stay.”

—29, female, tendonitis since 15 (has progressed into trigger finger), loss of hearing, depression and anxiety.

“Sometimes professors go to quickly through the course. I also go through personal struggles so that is also a challenge when trying to focus on school.

Sometimes professors can be unapproachable so it makes it difficult to get the help you need. However getting involved helps a lot.

I like the support I get from my sorority and also the teachers who genuinely care about the betterment of their students and their grades in school.”

—Sicilian/irish, Californian (bay area), 19 y.o., Christian, add/depression

“It feels difficult having a psychological challenge with the transition to college from high school but with the support of the learning communities such as CAMP and EOP it feels like a little family.

I have never had anxiety before until I started college with too much stress over tests and assignments due but later on with the support of the learning communities it felt good.”

—a mexican american

“As a student, we all have struggles. My struggle happens to be anxiety. It’s hard to deal with it at times but I find ways to manage.

As a freshman, my first experience was a little bit scary. My anxiety was through the roof, but I finally became comfortable with the CSUS life and found out why I’m really here and that is to become a nurse.

The people on campus are friendly.”

—female, Portuguese, 19, anxiety, employed and a student

“It is sometimes hard to know and compare from others a difference that I have. Not everyone knows what we go through but sure it is to keep working hard.”

—in the program of CAMP

“I took off one semester when my mother passes away and it set me back tremendously. That has been a very unfortunate bump in the road in my journey to graduation.”

—white 21 year old female

“I drank my way through last semester. Just trying to forget. My friends called me an alcoholic and they were right.”

—21

“I do like the psychological counseling center. Being able to schedule and talk with someone is highly beneficial. I wish it were more widely known.”

—Caucasian, first generation college, senior, 23, male

“Last semester was tough. My teacher noticed I wasn’t okay and talked to me. That was a turning point. I know where to go for help now when things get bad again.”

—Psychological struggles

“Sometimes I just don’t want to be here any more, school or life.”

—No student specifics given

“I had a very traumatic moment & I was able to get help from school to get me better.”

—Hispanic

Students with Personal Struggles

College can be a fun and exciting time, one of challenge, growth, and fulfillment. But students may also at any point struggle emotionally with something going on in their lives.

What They May Be Feeling

The National College Health Assessment (Spring 2019) by the American College Health Association, a survey of students at college and universities around the country, may give insight into the mindset and mental health of our own students at Sacramento State.

Students who reported the following with regard to the overall level of stress they experienced within the past year:

- 34.4% Average Stress
- 44.8% More than Average Stress
- 12.9% Tremendous Stress

Students who reported feeling the following at any time in the past year:

- 88.0% Overwhelmed By All They Had to Do
- 85.0% Exhausted (But Not from Physical Activity)
- 72.0% Very Sad
- 67.4% Very Lonely
- 66.4% Overwhelming Anxiety
- 57.5% Hopelessness
- 46.2% So Depressed that It Was Difficult to Function
- 44.8% Overwhelming Anger

Every single one of the percentages above is up from the year prior.

The Struggles They May Have

Students who reported that the following had been traumatic or difficult to handle in the past year:

- 52.7% Academics
- 37.8% Finances
- 36.5% Sleep Difficulties
- 35.5% Personal Appearance
- 33.9% Family Problems
- 33.1% Intimate Relationships
- 32.8% Other Social Relationships
- 29.0% Career-Related Issue
- 26.7% Personal Health Issue
- 22.6% Health Problem of a Family Member or Partner
- 17.7% Death of a Family Member or Friend
- 12.1% Other Things

Please note: 10.8% students reported only one of the above, 11.2% students reported two of the above, and 57.6% students reported three or more of the above. And with the exception of just one (career-related issue), every single one of the percentages above is up from the year prior.

The Impact on Academics

Students were also asked which of the following factors affected their individual academic performance (in terms of such things as lower test or assignment grades or overall course grade, or received an incomplete or dropped the course). Below you will find the percentage of students who reported the following:

Emotional Difficulties:

- 36.5% Stress
- 29.5% Anxiety
- 21.6% Depression
- 5.2% Homesickness

Money and Work Issues:

- 16.0% Work
- 8.3% Finances

Personal Health, Well-Being, and Safety:

- 24.3% Sleep Difficulties
- 4.6% Chronic Health Problem or Serious Illness
- 3.7% Chronic Pain
- 3.2% Alcohol Use
- 2.5% Injury
- 2.1% Drug Use
- 2.0% Eating Problems/Disorder
- 2.0% Sexual Assault
- 1.0% Physical Assault

Relationships and Interactions:

- 12.4% Concern for a Troubled Friend or Family Member
- 10.1% Relationship Difficulties
- 7.1% Roommate Difficulties
- 6.6% Death of a Friend or Family Member
- 1.5% Discrimination
- 0.8% Pregnancy (Yours or Partner's)

Many of these students weather the dark times through coping strategies, support and assistance from others in their lives, and campus services. Some, however, may struggle so much they begin to wonder just how long they can keep going—or even if they even want to.

Wanting to Hurt Themselves

Students who reported the following at any time in the past year:

- 9.5% Intentionally Cut, Burned, Bruised, or Otherwise Injured Themselves
- 14.4% Seriously Considered Suicide
- 2.3% Attempted Suicide

Every single one of these numbers on this page is up from the year prior.

[For further information, please see: [American College Health Association's "National College Health Assessment" \(Spring 2019\) \(PDF\)](https://www.acha.org/documents/ncha/NCHA-II_SPRING_2019_US_REFERENCE_GROUP_DATA_REPORT.pdf), https://www.acha.org/documents/ncha/NCHA-II_SPRING_2019_US_REFERENCE_GROUP_DATA_REPORT.pdf]

Not Wanting to Live Any More

According to statistics provided by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, in the year 2016:

- 9.8 million people age 18 and over in the nation had serious thoughts of suicide.
- 2.7 million people age 18 and over made a suicide plan.
- 1.3 million people age 18 and over attempted suicide.

Suicide consistently outnumber homicides in the nation by over double, and suicide rates have been going up over the past years for just about every age group, as well as for men and women. Men are about four times more likely to commit suicide, but women are more likely to think about and attempt suicide. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death for people ages 15 to 34, second only to unintentional injury, according to 2013 estimates, and in that year the rate of suicide deaths averaged about 113 deaths each day—nearly one suicide every 13 minutes.

With specific regard to college students, the Suicide Prevention Resource Center provides summaries of key studies of college students' reports of suicide thoughts and attempts (2012):

- 7.1% - 7.7% college undergraduate and graduate students seriously considered suicide.
- 2.2% - 2.3% college undergraduate and graduate students made a suicide plan.
- 0.6% - 1.2% college undergraduate and graduate students attempted suicide.

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center also provides the warning signs of suicide listed below, as well as the risk factors and preventive factors for suicide described on the following page.

Warning Signs

Immediate Risk of Suicide:

- Talking about wanting to die or hurt oneself
- Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online for a means or obtaining a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live

Serious Risk of Suicide:

- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated, showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

These latter behaviors may be especially indicative of serious suicide risk if new, have increased, and/or seem related to a painful event, loss, or change.

The warning signs above tell us to do something right now to help a person in actual immediate or serious danger of hurting themselves. The risk factors provided on the next page help us to better identify who is most at risk potentially of suicidal thought or action.

[For further information, please see: [Suicide Prevention Resource Center website](http://www.sprc.org/), <http://www.sprc.org/> and the SPRC report, "[Suicide among College and University Students in the United States](http://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/migrate/library/SuicideAmongCollegeStudentsInUS.pdf)" (PDF), <http://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/migrate/library/SuicideAmongCollegeStudentsInUS.pdf>]

Risk Factors

Factors that raise the likelihood of suicidal thoughts, attempts, or deaths include the following:

Mental Health: Depression, anxiety, other psychological disorders, substance abuse, self-injury (without intent to die), and past suicide attempts.

Feelings: Hopelessness; loneliness, isolation, or lack of belonging; low tolerance for stress and frustration; anger or hostility; and feeling like a burden to others (e.g., family and friends).

Behavior: Risk-taking, impulsivity, delinquency, and poor problem solving/coping skills.

Stressful Life Circumstances: Loss of a loved one, relationship break-ups, dating violence, school or work troubles, financial difficulties, sleeping problems, chronic physical illness or disability, and physical, sexual, and/or psychological abuse occurring in the past and/or present.

Family Life: Family history of suicidal behavior, parental mental health problems, family violence or abuse (past and/or present), family instability or loss, and lack of parental support.

School and Community: Stigma associated with seeking care; limited access to medical or mental health care; negative social/emotional environment, including negative feelings and interactions with staff and students; and exposure to stigma or discrimination against students based on sexual orientation, gender identity, race and ethnicity, disability, or physical characteristics (e.g., being overweight).

Again, note that risk factors indicate heightened risk of potential suicide—not to be confused with the warning signs provided prior of actual immediate or serious risk and the need for action.

Protective Factors

Factors that lower the likelihood of suicide include:

The Individual: Psychological and emotional well-being, self-esteem, positive outlook on the future, desire to finish school, internal locus of control over the circumstances of one's life, problem solving and coping skills (e.g., conflict resolution), management of emotions and tolerance for frustration, spiritual beliefs or regular church attendance, cultural and religious beliefs that celebrate life and discourage suicide, physical activity, and a sense of responsibility to family or friends (not wanting to hurt them).

Their Support System: Involvement and connection with family, friends, and romantic partners, and support from others such as teachers, mentors, coaches, bosses, student group leaders, and faith leaders.

Their Campus and Surrounding Community: Supportive and inclusive peer and mentor environment, connectedness to the school and sense of belonging to the campus community, availability and accessibility of student support services and staff, involvement in extracurricular activities (e.g., student clubs and organizations), and access to effective medical and mental health care.

These factors provide a buffer to stress and adversity and, therefore, lower incidence of self-harm. Knowing what these are also helps us, as individuals and as a campus community, to cultivate these protective factors in all the ways possible in our various spheres of responsibility and exposure to students.

What We Can Do

Students may experience some personal problem or serious crisis in their lives that causes distress in their time here. This may occur at any point in the semester, but especially around midterms and final exams, which can be a particularly rough time for students in terms of stress, worry, and personal problems.

Be on the Lookout

We can't always tell when a student may be going through something. The student outwardly may appear quite calm or content, but keep strictly hidden private secrets and struggles. There are, however, things to look or listen for:

Indications a student may be going through something—

A downward slide in course performance, missing assignments, becoming tardy or absent more frequently, appearing exhausted or complaining of sleep difficulties, significant weight loss or gain, disheveled appearance (not taking care of themselves), mood swings, withdrawal or isolation, distractedness, frequent and marked preoccupation, apathy or extreme emotion (e.g., tearfulness, depression, panic), signs of substance abuse, concern for the student shown by classmates or peers.

Potential triggers of depression or anxiety—

Extreme homesickness, loneliness, or difficulty adjusting to college life; pressure to succeed or the rigors of academia; high anxiety or uncertainty over finding a major or career path; personal illness or psychological difficulties; a bad situation where they work or live, in a class or relationship, or in family life; a painful break-up, falling out with friends, or ongoing roommate conflict or workplace strife; financial stress or legal difficulties; loss of their job, home, or someone they love.

Groups at greater risk of stress—

LGBTIQ students, student-veterans, reentry students, multilingual students, and students who are former foster youth, have disabilities, or are newer to the campus (freshmen, transfer, reentry, and international students).

Warning signs of suicide—

Immediate Risk: Talking about wanting to die or hurt oneself, looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online for a means or obtaining a gun, talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.

Serious Risk: Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain, talking about being a burden to others, increasing the use of alcohol or drugs, acting anxious or agitated or behaving recklessly, sleeping too much or too little, withdrawing or feeling isolated, showing rage or talking about seeking revenge, displaying extreme mood swings.

Talk to Them

As faculty and staff, we may become concerned for a student who appears to be struggling with personal difficulties. Our hearts may go out to them, but we sometimes don't know exactly how to approach the student, or what to say or do. The short answer here, to an incredibly important situation, is this:

Talk to the student privately, express honestly your concerns for the student, listen quietly to the student's response, and offer your genuine empathy and willingness to help. *Faculty and staff may be such significant sources of comfort, support, and encouragement to a student in need.*

Campus services are also key. You will find descriptions of the campus resources available to the student to work through difficulties at the end of this document.

Please note that immediate safety actions would be required in the case of a student who poses a danger to themselves or to others, and well as in situations with students whose disruptiveness is clearly reckless, disorderly, or threatening.

When uncertain about how to handle a situation with a student, there are multiple options available:

Red Folder

The California State University asks that you trust your instincts and do something when a student's behavior troubles or worries you. The Red Folder provides a protocol for determining the appropriate response to students who are distressed or disruptive; lists academic, psychological, physical, and safety indicators; and offers resources and tips. The Red Folder is accessible on every Sacramento State computer desktop and online:
[Red Folder Website](https://calstate.edu/red-folder/?campusSel=Sacramento) <https://calstate.edu/red-folder/?campusSel=Sacramento>

Behavioral Intervention Assistance

The Behavioral Intervention Team is a resource for faculty and staff to address students displaying behaviors of concern in variety of settings, including the classroom, an office or service location, an on-campus job, or while participating in an extracurricular activity. Once a report of concerning behavior is received, the Behavioral Intervention Team will reach out to the student to intervene, provide support, and connect them with resources that can assist them.

[Behavioral Intervention Assistance Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/crisis-assistance-resource-education-support/behavioral-intervention-assistance.html) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/crisis-assistance-resource-education-support/behavioral-intervention-assistance.html>

Student Health and Counseling Services (SHCS)

You may also consult with campus Counseling Services by calling SHCS and identifying yourself to the receptionist as a faculty or staff member with a question or concern regarding a student, and will be put through to a counselor to discuss the matter.

Phone: (916) 278-6461

[SHCS Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/>

Build a Safety Net of Connections

We will not always see when a student needs help, and they may never reach out to us. However, someone else in that student's life may see and assist that student in need, and this makes building connections so important.

When students connect with one another and faculty and staff, they have people they can turn to and lean on: People they feel they can talk to, people who will listen. People who can sometimes divert them from their troubles, get them to take calming breath or a walk, encourage them to smile and laugh despite their many troubles. People to advise or assist when things aren't going well, and support them in times of stress or adversity. People to keep an eye out and direct them to help when they need it. *The key is people who care and strong, healthy connections.*

Research tells us that connections are a wonderful protective factor when in place and a risk factor for those without that support system. Connections also, of course, increase academic success, becoming all the more imperative.

We can help to build and strengthen that support system for students in many ways.

Icebreakers in class that first day of the semester and class lessons or assignments that incorporate discussion and pair/group work, as well as introductions of one student to another student or to faculty and staff out on campus, all can help students to make connections.

Involvement in campus life also helps students to forge connections, as well as offering a number of other benefits, including positively impacting academic performance and helping students to gain valuable experiences and opportunities to develop communication and leadership skills. Faculty and staff can encourage student engagement by announcing campus events and extracurricular activities (or building these into course assignments), and explaining the importance of these to students.

These are small things to do, but a big difference they could make.

Make Known Campus Resources

Part of the strength of the safety net is all students knowing the help available on campus—to help their friend or classmate, or to use themselves if needed at some future point.

On the following page, you will find a description of all that SHCS Counseling on campus has to offer and more that would be tremendously helpful to students in need.

(With appreciation to
all who support, encourage, and assist students with personal struggles on our campus
—every single one of you who reaches out to or helps in some way a student in need,
and especially to
Ronald L. Lutz, Clinical Director, Student Health and Counseling Services,
for assistance with this information.)

Campus Resources

Counseling (Student Health and Counseling Services)—

Helps students to cope with such things as stress, academic difficulties, cultural adjustment, relationship issues, anxiety, depression, bereavement, post-traumatic symptoms, questioning sexuality and coming out, eating disorders, addiction and alcohol abuse. The privacy and confidentiality of all who use Counseling Services is maintained fully within the bounds of law and professional ethics.

Location of Counseling Services: The WELL, Second Floor Phone: (916) 278-6461

Location of Urgent Care Clinic: The WELL, First Floor

[Counseling Services Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/counseling/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/counseling/>

Students in an immediate crisis should contact 911 or the Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Students with urgent concerns who would like to see someone right away may walk in to receive counseling at the Urgent Care Clinic (WELL, First Floor) any time during its hours of operation or call to speak with the After Hours Nurse at: (916) 278-6461.

Students who want to receive counseling or explore if counseling is right for them may schedule an appointment by calling or coming in Counseling Services, or going online through the Patient Portal. This typically begins with a consultation appointment, where the student can talk about their concerns and receive support and feedback. Many students find that they feel better and their needs are met in just one session. Students who want to continue counseling may choose individual counseling in follow-up single session appointments (to meet their needs in the moment) or short-term individual therapy (more than one session with the same mental health clinician). Students may also join group therapy (with five to ten other students): There is a diversity of groups (including those for men, women, LGBT students, international students, and undergraduate students) and topics (including groups for anxiety, anger management, mindfulness and meditation, creating good habits, coping with loss, improving relationships, and surviving family dysfunction).

CARES (Crisis Assistance and Resource Education Support)—

Provides support to students who are experiencing unique challenges to their education or are in crisis. CARES gives referrals to campus and community resources and follow-up support to address a variety of issues, including but not limited to: transportation barriers, mental or physical health and wellness, and financial, housing, and food struggles. The website also includes many online resources for students regarding financial aid and employment, food security, and housing security. *Help is just a visit, a phone call or an email away.*

Location: University Union, First Floor 1260

Phone: (916) 278-5138

[CARES Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/crisis-assistance-resource-education-support/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/crisis-assistance-resource-education-support/>