

The Health Need-Capacity Disparity Among HSU Students

Humboldt State University and its students face a number of important challenges in the area of both physical and mental health impacting retention, which are related to four primary factors: University Size, Higher Needs, Systemic Barriers, and Location.

University Size: The smaller size of the university compared to others in the CSU system is one factor that reliably increases the cost per student for access to on-campus health services as a result of fixed costs. The Student Health and Wellbeing Team consists of 45-50 full-time staff including medical providers (physicians and nurse practitioners), registered nurses, medical assistants, as well as psychologists/psychotherapists, and part-time staff including student employees and trainees. While some of these staff costs scale with enrollment, others costs such medical records, laboratory, radiology, pharmacy, accreditation compliance, staff training, and building maintenance generally do not, raising the total cost per student compared with larger universities providing the same services. A facilities audit performed in 2014-15 also points to nearly \$3 million in deferred maintenance and renewal costs for the Student Health & Counseling (SHC) building, which would be comparable for a much larger university but more expensive per student with lower enrollment.

Higher Need: A 2017 campus-wide HealthyMinds Survey revealed 1746 students with untreated mental health concerns at HSU. This confirms other data, including that from the 2016 NSSE and ACHA's National College Health Assessment which both show HSU students as dramatically elevated in health needs compared with both other CSUs and national averages. When asked "How would you describe your health?" Nationally 85% of reference group (RG) students reported good, very good, or excellent health. CSU was 5 percentage points lower at 80%, and HSU was another 5% lower at 75% and only half of HSU students reported their health was either very good or excellent - another 5-7% lower among trans* students and students of color. 68% of all HSU students screen positive for anxiety (61% depressive symptoms) compared with closer to 40% nationally. Heartbreakingly, we also know that 4% of HSU students have reported attempting suicide in the past year which is significantly higher than almost all other universities in the country.

Systemic Barriers: Resource insecurity and systematic barriers to accessing health services results in a population of students who arrive at HSU underserved and underinsured or uninsured and this has a direct impact on psychological health & academic success. URM students are disproportionately affected. Other related areas of resource insecurity including food scarcity further contribute to physical and mental health concerns. *Location:* There is a 4600:1 ratio of psychiatrists to citizens in the Arcata Community, compared with 1,500:1 in a location like San Luis Obispo. The lack of primary care and other providers is similarly low, making it challenging to impossible for students and staff both to find health care in the community. Students, who on paper have insurance, in reality have little or no access to anything except emergency care. The roughly 1 in 5 of our students whose families signed up for Kieser would need to travel more than 5 hours for even basic care, and more than half of

students face similar challenges with medical that doesn't work in and can't easily be transferred to Humboldt county, plans that require primary care referrals they can't obtain, or waitlists for care. We also know isolation is a significant risk factor for suicide risk, one of the reasons Humboldt County as a whole as a suicide death rate twice the California average.

Impact on Retention: The Health Needs-Capacity Disparity means students have inevitably higher health fees than the rest of the CSU, service for walk-in services on campus that exceed an hour, and wait times of weeks for counseling and months for psychiatric medication management. As a result, many have miss class to get help or drop out before they can get needed counseling or psychiatric treatment. It's settled science that money invested in health is a force-multiplier – increasing retention and improving the impact of resources invested in all other activities across campus. HSU Students are anxious, depressed, and suicidal in large numbers. Untreated mental health problems increase dropout rates. And, national and local data is conclusive that health and CAPS staff are effective treating exactly these issues. Our best evidence suggests treating 100 students prevents 6.48 dropouts, meaning that if we could increase capacity to meet the needs of 1000 of the 1746 students with untreated mental health concerns, 64+ additional students will persist at HSU every year¹.

¹ See <http://wellbeing.humboldt.edu/data> and <http://www2.humboldt.edu/irp/reports.html> for related data and summary reports.