

Effectively engaging college students through on campus mental health programming: An examination of program design, outreach and evaluation of skills-based workshops

THE OPPORTUNITY, LCSW
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Agenda

1. Evolution and Trajectory of group programming at Hunter College
2. Group Program Design
3. Communications and Messaging Strategies
4. Data Analysis and Assessment
5. Q & A

Increasing demand for mental health services at colleges across the nation

- ▶ 2009 – 2015, counseling service utilization grew 6 times faster than the rate of enrollment nationwide (CCMH 2015)
- ▶ Students continued to report Generalized Anxiety and Social Anxiety as the major areas of concern (CCMH 2015)
- ▶ Anxiety, followed by depression and relationship challenges continue to be identified as the top-most concerns reported by clinicians when assessing college students (CCMH 2018)

Utilization trends at Hunter College - CWS

- ▶ 92% increase in service requests and a 72% increase in walk-in requests which necessitated immediate assessment, since 2009
- ▶ 50% increase in routine appointments and a 64% increase in total number of clients served, over the 2017 - '18 academic year
- ▶ Top three presenting problems reported by students:
 - > Anxiety
 - > Depression
 - > Academic Distress

Navigating a challenging landscape: How to do more with less?

- ▶ Staffing shortages and increasing demands
- ▶ A call for more effective resource management – implementing effective procedures and strategies to do more with less
- ▶ Developing prevention focused strategies
- ▶ Reaching and serving a greater number of students, before they are in crisis

Establishing innovative strategies to reach students' mental health needs

- ▶ Offering a wider scope of programming
- ▶ Implementing a user-friendly program design format
- ▶ Using CCAPS data to inform programming decisions
- ▶ Developing a targeted marketing/communications messaging strategy
- ▶ Formulating an effective program evaluation strategy

Evolution of group programming at Hunter College – CWS

- ▶ CWS launched its first group programming in 2013.
- ▶ Rationale for expanding a growing service
- ▶ Finding new and innovative ways to meet students' mental health needs
- ▶ Our inaugural program consisted of a six-week psycho educational Compassion Fatigue support group
 - Designed for Nursing and Social Work students
 - Identified groups reporting elevated distress levels
 - Curriculum based

Trajectory of Hunter College group programming

- ▶ Utilization data indicated that anxiety was the number one concern reported amongst students, as well as by the clinicians assessing them. (CCMH 2015)
- ▶ In 2015, Mastering Anxiety Workshop was introduced as a one hour psycho educational skills based workshop.
 - Mindfulness and cognitive restructuring skills
 - It has become a staple of our group offerings
 - Enrollment and evaluation data remains consistently favorable

Building upon existing programming

- ▶ Survey data collected from students recruited for the Mastering Anxiety workshop with high-cut CCAPS scores for overall distress, showed that 45% attributed their stress and anxiety to "academic distress"
- ▶ Learning from students that academic concerns were a burgeoning concern
- ▶ We piloted a cognitive restructuring activity focusing on procrastination behaviors at a Campus Wellness Festival, in 2016.
 - 91% of students who attended the Festival participated in the activity
 - 41% of those who participated in the activity indicated that the procrastination activity was "the most valuable part of participating in the festival."

Expansion of Hunter College – CWS group programming

- ▶ In 2017, CWS introduced the Preventing Procrastination workshop.
 - > 45-minute skills based workshop
 - > Mindfulness and cognitive restructuring techniques
- ▶ In 2018, the Fostering Healthy Relationships workshop was launched. Looking at national trends, we learned that "relationships difficulties" were cited to be one of the top three presenting problems cited by students. (CCMH 2018)

Lessons learned along the way

- ▶ Over the years, CWS has further refined and expanded group programming based on recognizing unmet student needs, though analyzing and collecting data and by examining national trends.
- ▶ We ultimately learned through all we did and each program we piloted further informed what we are doing today.
- ▶ Recruiting students, maintaining enrollment and managing attrition have historically been a challenge.
- ▶ Sporadic attendance and uneven student commitment levels have posed challenges directly impact program sustainability

Group program design considerations

- ▶ Consider student's needs
- ▶ Identify trends
- ▶ Carefully time your programming
- ▶ Recruitment
- ▶ Design Choice - Skills based vs. psycho educational vs. support groups
- ▶ Open vs. closed groups
- ▶ Frequency - single session vs. multi-session formats
- ▶ Collaborations – On campus departments and off campus resources can provide technical assistance or co-sponsorship

Meeting student's mental health needs through effective program design

- ▶ CWS shifted to 1 hour single session workshops tailored to meet the demands of time strapped students
- ▶ Scheduling workshops during Dean's hours when classes are not scheduled
- ▶ Sessions provide psycho education and introduce interactive exercises that are practiced with handouts
- ▶ Incorporating skills-based material ranging from mindfulness and cognitive restructuring techniques, such as PMR, to Deep Breathing
- ▶ Feedback is provided throughout – students are encouraged to incorporate the practice at home or in their spare time

Challenges: What we have learned along the way

- ▶ Devising an innovative marketing and recruitment strategy
- ▶ A shift away from a multi-session format to a single-session workshop model focusing on skills has yielded compelling results
- ▶ A look at the literature, reveals that skills-oriented programming which is curriculum based, has been shown to yield superior results when compared with other modalities (Conley, Durlak 2013)

Rationale for skills-based interventions

- ▶ Supervised skills-based interventions
 1. Behavior Rehearsal
 2. Positive Feedback
- ▶ Supervised skills-based practice interventions were on average 7 times more likely to achieve positive results than were psycho educational interventions not focusing on skills training. (Conley, Durlak 2013)
- ▶ Supervised skills-based programs have been found to be 5 times more likely to achieve positive results when compared to skills-based programs not containing "supervised-skills." (Conley, Durlak 2013)

Developing an Effective Communications/Messaging Strategy

- ▶ Creating straight-forward, streamlined communications
- ▶ Using a multi-channel approach
- ▶ Effectively timing messaging
- ▶ Automating messaging
- ▶ Using an RSVP confirmation system following initial registration
- ▶ Using CCAPS data to identify and target student groups in distress, devise a plan to reach them

Using CCAPS data to formulate customized messaging

- ▶ Using CCAPS data to target students
- ▶ Collaborating with Office of Student Communication (OSCS) to devise an automated email messaging campaign targeting those student groups identified as having high-cut CCAPS sub-scale scores
- ▶ Each group is e-mailed a customized invitation

Targeting student groups with high-cut sub-scale scores for anxiety & overall distress:

- ◆ Anthropology
- ◆ Art History
- ◆ Chemistry
- ◆ Computer Science
- ◆ Psychology
- ◆ Sociology
- ◆ Incoming Freshman and transfers
- ◆ Pre-Health
- ◆ Undeclared Majors

What we've learned about communications messaging

- ▶ Evaluating messaging channels, e.g. word of mouth, campus monitors, student portals, digital newsletters, email, your website
- ▶ Email messaging has been shown to be the most widely effective means of reaching students (Ammigan, Laws 2018)
- ▶ Grouping events together in a newsletter format with embedded RSVP hyper links where students can register within one or two clicks
- ▶ Grouping events has yielded higher registration rates
- ▶ Capping registration has been helpful in managing online registration flow. It can be re-opened at a later time, if RSVP targets are not met.

Email messaging and attendance confirmation

- ▶ The more interaction a student has with an email communication with regard to responding to a "call to action," the more likely they are to read and process the information.
- ▶ Embedding a "call to action" into your e-mail messaging, wherein the recipient is asked to answer a question or is prompted to click on a hyper link, can increase readership and translate into bolstering attendance.
- ▶ Benefits of using an automated RSVP system -
 - Knowing when to cancel events
 - Encourages student engagement and accountability
 - Efficient use of resources

Using an automated RSVP system

- ▶ Students are asked to confirm their attendance, 5 days prior to the event. If they say "no", they are invited to check our website and are then redirected to our workshop offerings page.
- ▶ If they say "yes," they are prompted to answer an automated multiple question; i.e. "To what do you attribute your anxiety?"
 - a.) family pressures, b.) academics demands, etc.
- ▶ On-going surveying
 - Learn about student concerns
 - Obtain valuable data
 - Guide group facilitation and exercises

Efficacy of our communications strategy

- ▶ CWS has experienced increased response and attendance rates
- ▶ Our progress points to actualized growth in workshop attendance which has translated into doing more with less.
- ▶ Workshop enrollment has increased 42% in the Fall of '18, as compared to Fall of '17
- ▶ 2018-'19, CWS conducted 11 workshops (5 in Fall, 6 Spring) 91 students attended; as compared to 2015-'16 where a total of 19 workshops offered of which 76 students attended.
- ▶ Fewer workshops scheduled and more students served has translated into less resources needed

Mastering Anxiety Workshop

- ▶ A combination of mindfulness and CBT techniques are taught and practiced in a one hour session.
- ▶ Thought Log – before and after exercise
- ▶ Introduction of cognitive restructuring and the cognitive triangle
- ▶ Challenging and labeling maladaptive thoughts
- ▶ Cognitive restructuring exercise, as a group or in sub-groups
- ▶ End with a guided visual imagery

Preventing Procrastination: Finding New Ways of Thinking and Coping with Academic Distress

- ▶ Teaches students how to utilize deep breathing, PMR and cognitive restructuring to reduce procrastination behaviors
- ▶ Introduction to the Cognitive Triangle
- ▶ Encourages students to identify and challenge maladaptive thoughts
- ▶ A series of cognitive restructure exercises are practiced
- ▶ Students are encouraged to consider new ways of thinking and responding to academic challenges and to incorporate learned skills into their time management and study routines

Fostering Healthy Relationships

- ▶ Discussion of self-compassion, with a focus on developing healthy relationships with one's self.
- ▶ Reflection upon the different types of relationships and getting ones' needs met
- ▶ Discussion of effective conflict resolution skills
- ▶ Learn how to identify a healthy relationship from an unhealthy one

How to devise an outcome driven evaluation plan

- ▶ Evaluate program goals and objectives - This is important in helping you to further refine your program and to more effectively address the needs of your students and your service
- ▶ Think about how and when best to collect data
- ▶ Consider what type of data you want to collect
- ▶ Implementation of pre and post surveys
- ▶ Be deliberate and succinct in your survey question formulation

Considerations for survey construction

- ▶ Surveys should be user friendly-- Can they be completed on a device with multiple choice drop down menus?
- ▶ How long does it take to complete?
- ▶ Will surveys be anonymous or confidential?
- ▶ When to use text boxes? Will there be a character limit?
- ▶ When to use forced responses?
- ▶ How will you effectively compare pre and post survey data?

How do we measure our program?

- ▶ We have focused on measuring learning objectives
- ▶ We collect pre and post survey data
 - Determining when to collect data is important
- ▶ We ask students to complete a short pre and post survey immediately before and then again immediately following the workshop.
- ▶ How are surveys administered, e.g. paper, electronically, through a URL link?
- ▶ We use both paper and a URL link, so that students can complete surveys on their smartphones.
- ▶ Survey items are concise
- ▶ We use Likert Scale responses as well as open-ended questions to gather student responses

Survey Data: 2017-'18 Mastering Anxiety: 94% Response Rate

Learning outcomes measured:

1. **I understand what anxiety is and how it affects me.**
 - Prior to completing the workshop, 30.55 % of students indicated they strongly agreed that they knew what anxiety was and how it affects them.
 - Immediately following, 62.5 % indicated they strongly agreed.
 - This demonstrates a 32 percentage point increase in expression of student understanding of what anxiety is and how it affects them.

Mastering Anxiety: Survey Data 2017-'18

2. **I understand how my thoughts and emotions affect my behavior.**
 - Prior to completing the workshop, 35.48 % of students indicated they strongly agreed that they understand how their thoughts and emotions affect their behaviors.
 - Immediately following, 65.63 % indicated they strongly agreed.
 - This demonstrates a 30 percentage point increase in student understanding of how their thoughts and feelings affect their behavior.

Mastering Anxiety: Survey Data 2017-'18

- 3. I know how to reduce my anxiety.
 - > Prior to the workshop, 12 % indicated they *strongly to moderately agreed* that they knew how to reduce their anxiety.
 - > Immediately following the workshop 75 % of students indicated they *strongly to moderately agreed*.
 - This shows a **62 percentage point** increase in student understanding of how to reduce anxiety.

Preventing Procrastination Survey Data: 2017-'18 100% Response Rate

- 1. I understand how maladaptive thinking or "thinking traps" can affect me.
 - > Prior to the workshop, just 18.18 % of students indicated they *strongly agreed* that they understood how maladaptive thinking or "thinking traps" can affect them.
 - > Immediately following, 59.09 % indicated they *strongly agreed*.
 - This shows a **41% point increase** in student understanding of how maladaptive thinking can affect them.

Preventing Procrastination Survey Data: 2017-'18 100% Response Rate

- 2. I understand how my thoughts and emotions affect my behavior.
 - > Prior to the workshop, 40.91 % of students indicated they *strongly agreed* that they understood how thoughts and feelings can affect their behavior.
 - > Immediately following, 63.64 % indicated they *strongly agreed*.
 - This shows a **23 % point increase** in student understanding how their thoughts and feelings can affect their behavior.

Preventing Procrastination Survey Data: 2017-'18

- 3. I know how to reduce procrastination behaviors.
 - > Prior to the workshop, just 13.55% of students indicated they *strongly to moderately agreed* that they know how to reduce procrastination behaviors.
 - > Immediately following, 77.27% indicated they *strongly to moderately agreed*.
 - This shows a **64% point increase** in students' expression of how to reduce procrastination behavior.

Healthy Relationships: Survey Data 2018-'19

- 1. I feel equipped with strategies to effectively manage relationships.
 - > Prior to the workshop, just 36.84 % indicated they *strongly to moderately agreed* that they felt equipped with strategies to effectively manage relationships.
 - > Immediately following, 70.97 % indicated they *strongly to moderately agreed*.
 - This shows a **34.13 % point increase** in students' expression of feeling equipped with strategies to effectively manage relationships.

What student's are saying..

- > "Knowing that I'm not the only one with these feelings and learning different methods of relaxation. Breaking into group and writing down our thoughts. Others sharing the same feeling and connecting in that way."
- > "Hearing the different perspectives and experiences that my peers have been through in regard to the relationships in their life was most helpful"
- > Having an opportunity to learn from others' experiences generally left students feeling less alone and appeared to be the most universally cited take away expressed by students.
- > Overall, students expressed they found sharing experiences with others to be helpful and affirming.

What student's are saying..

- ▶ *"The most beneficial part of this workshop was understanding why I procrastinate. Now that I understand where the problem stems from I'm going to use the strategies to work on overcoming them."*
- ▶ *"Learning the different strategies to combat against procrastination and hearing other students share their experiences."*
- ▶ Students cited that learning mindfulness techniques and learning how to effectively identify and challenge maladaptive thought patterns or "mind traps" to tackle procrastination behaviors to be most helpful.

What student's are saying..

- ▶ *"I found value in everything that was presented. I liked the PMR and the Cognitive Restructure. I will be using these exercises everyday. Thanks"*
- ▶ *"I learned new coping techniques to manage my stress and anxiety, which I am hopeful will help me focus better in classes and find time for fun and happiness."*
- ▶ Deep breathing and PMR was cited by students to be most helpful, as well as, establishing heightened understanding of how to challenge and restructure maladaptive thinking.

What student's are saying..

- ▶ *"Learning how to control my anxiety. I really enjoyed the breathing exercises and PMR."*
- ▶ *"I learned new coping techniques to manage my stress and anxiety, which I am hopeful will help me focus better in classes and find time for fun and happiness."*
- ▶ *"I felt grateful to have been a part of discussion that is geared towards helping students cope with anxiety. The techniques that can be used to help us with this manner were most informative and I will definitely apply them in my day to day life."*
- ▶ Students consistently cited learning techniques and strategies to better manage anxiety to be most helpful.

Next steps – Future Plans

- ▶ Further enhancing our efforts to incorporate increased opportunities for student interaction
- ▶ Increase breakout group session containing more interactive exercises
- ▶ Continue to use data to drive our programming decisions
- ▶ Further enhancement of our evaluation surveying techniques

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