

Students struggle with added pandemic anxiety

TRISTAN BENNETT

NEWS EDITOR

College students across the nation flocked back to their campuses for the fall semester after an extended summer break due to the pandemic. Universities spent that time laying out guidelines and best practices to protect their campuses from COVID-19, but those changes brought with them even more stress on students' shoulders. Riley Sisson, a sophomore from Bald Knob, started nursing school this semester. The pandemic added another layer to an already stressful semester for her.

"Coronavirus has really made it difficult, which means that I am under a lot of stress. We can't have in-person classes, and the Wi-Fi on campus has been very weak lately," Sisson said. Being on a university campus in the midst of a pandemic brings unexpected challenges that may have never been considered. With more classes online, more students need internet access throughout the day. For Sisson, something as seemingly small as lagging internet adds to the stress of everyday college life. This has been the case across the country.

A survey conducted by the Healthy Minds Network for Research on Adolescent and Young Adult Mental Health and the American College Health Association found that cases of depression in students rose over 5% from fall 2019 to May 2020, and many students reported their mental health affected their academic performance negatively after the onset of the pandemic. Phil Hestand, a licensed psychologist and director of the

Arkansas State University Counseling Center, never closed the center and continues to provide counseling services to students virtually. He said there are several different concerns to beware of during this time.

Alone Together

By definition, those in isolation or quarantine must be alone. However, COVID-19 guidelines and closures forced loneliness on the general public. A-State students cannot visit each other's dorms, are rarely allowed to hold events and are forbidden from most of the social interaction they have always known.

"Life on campus has changed for a lot of students," Hestand said. "Some students seem to be going on about their business like nothing is unusual. But for a lot of students, they are isolated, they are lonely."

Many people meet their lifelong best friends in the first few weeks of college, but this year's freshmen class did not get a welcome week like normal, making it hard to make those friendships. Hestand urged students feeling

isolated to use alternative means to stay connected.

"You may not be able to go to a friend's apartment as frequently as you used to, and you may not be able to be in as much physical contact as you might have been in the past, but you can continue to foster relationships," he said.

In the age of the internet, almost anything you can do in person, you can also do virtually. Everything from classes to trivia nights to dates have been moved online. Hestand recommends using this to an advantage as a means to stay connected, meet new people and curb loneliness.

When Anxiety Attacks

In a normal year, anxiety is a major concern for college students, but the pandemic magnified the issue, bringing fear of the unknown into play. The same study conducted by the Healthy Minds Network and the American College Health Association found nearly 65% of students surveyed were very concerned about people they care for contracting the virus and nearly 35% worried about their own sense of safety. When this is added on top of the

anxiety of just being a college student, the issue gets deeper.

"The normal human nature thing is that if something is frightening you or provoking anxiety, what would you do? Avoid it," Hestand said. "And if you avoid it, it feels better because you're not anxious anymore."

Avoiding the problem only leads to more anxiety in the long run, according to Hestand.

Ashlynn Rippy, a freshman criminology major from Paragould, said she struggles to motivate herself in her online classes.

"Only one of my classes is a hybrid, two are on Zoom and the other two are completely independent. The first three are pretty easy to manage but the asynchronous ones are difficult because I don't have the motivation or reminders when things are due," Rippy said.

Hestand said the only way to overcome anxiety is to approach and work through the anxiety-inducing situation. For online classes, this means diving into the material and staying organized to keep track of due dates

Coping with Coronavirus

Coping mechanisms for stress and anxiety reach far and wide; some of those are not always good for the individual. According to Harvard Medical School, unhealthy responses to stress could include under- or overeating, sleeping too much, drinking or using illegal drugs and lashing out at others. Many times, humans learn their coping skills through witnessing family members handle their stress growing up. Hestand said many students come to counseling just to learn better coping methods.

"Students will still say 'oh I'm not that bad' or 'I'm not crazy. I don't need to go talk to a counselor,'" Hestand said. "But we hardly ever talk to crazy students. We talk to students that have poor coping skills."

According to Hestand, the first step toward healthy coping is to get oneself into a deep state of relaxation. To do this, the Anxiety and Depression Association of America suggests practicing yoga, listening to music, eating-well balanced meals, counting to 10 slowly or taking deep

breaths. However, everyone has their way of relaxing.

Sisson said, "Lately, I have been spending more time reading my Bible and going to my small groups. Praying and listening to worship music help me to keep my faith in the Lord and to de-stress."

Talk It Out

The A-State Counseling Center offers one-on-one counseling virtually for all students as well as group sessions. Pat Glascock, licensed professional counselor and center associate director, is starting a weekly mindfulness group open to all students to learn meditation practices. Devin Nelson, licensed associate counselor, leads an anxiety group for those who would like to work together to overcome their stress.

Hestand, "A lot of times our problems with anxiety or relationships are social. They're problems we experience in our interactions with other people. So, dealing with it in a group of people who are dealing with similar issues is a really effective way to learn better ways of dealing with it."

While Hestand suggests personal counseling, the Counseling Center also offers free online self-help. It includes modules on stress management, anxiety, relationships and problem solving that can be completed without a counselor.

For many students, the added stress of a pandemic on top of normal college life has led to anxiety and uncertainty. While many can learn to cope on their own, Hestand recommends any student struggling should reach out to the counseling center and make an appointment.



Graphic by: Drew Morgan | Graphic Editor

CORRECTION: In the story “Student Government Association hears a petition to rename buildings on campus,” the name should have been spelled Nathan Wheaton.

2020 Homecoming Court

King Nominees

Rashad Kirksey

Morgan Blankenship

Will Smith

Blake Moore

Keyon Atkins

Queen Nominees

Blaze Cantrell

Alexa Floyd

Megan Gunnels

Paige McCord

Makayla Sprinkle

CAMPUS CRIME

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Sept. 15 | 5:25 p.m.

Lisenda Acosta-Gonzalez told officers she was concerned about her friend, Brandon McFadden, because Mason Mullis had pulled a gun on him and sent her threatening messages via Snapchat. Acosta-Gonzalez said she met Mullis several days prior to the report while walking on a sidewalk adjacent to University Hall. He was reportedly staying with Jywon Green on the weekends.

On the day of the incident, she received a message from Mullis stating he was outside, and she asked a friend to walk down to meet him with her. Mullis got upset that she had brought another male with her and began to curse at her until Acosta-Gonzalez and her friend left. He then began sending her threatening messages asking if she had called the police on him. One message said, “Lmao I should’ve let hoe go show you

who tf you playing wit but it’s all good I got bigger shii to worry about.”

Officers also spoke with Green about the concerns involving Mullis. They told him that due to COVID-19 restrictions, allowing a non-student into a resident hall was a violation of campus policy. Green said he did not believe Mullis had brought a gun onto campus, but he was seen by a Kay’s Hall elevator camera pulling a handgun out of his hoodie pocket.

Later on that night, University Police spotted a vehicle that looked like one in photos on Mullins’ social media, and officers followed. Mullis was held at gunpoint. He complied and was handcuffed and searched him for weapons, but none were found. He was transported to the Craighead County Detention Center where he was booked on charges of possession of a firearm by certain persons and handguns-possession by a minor or on school property. His bond was

set at \$150,000 cash or surety.

Green was referred to Student Conduct for allowing Mullis into the building and providing false information to officers.

Sept. 18 | 10:30 a.m.

University Police received a complaint that Tara Thomason had been receiving harassing phone calls. The calls started with no one talking and then someone with a deep voice said, “I saw you on Facebook, and I like you.” The number traces back to Jamaica, and it has been blocked from calling campus phones.

Sept. 18 | 11:30 p.m.

University Police initiated a traffic stop on a vehicle traveling north on Marion Berry Parkway. The driver presented their driver’s license and proof of insurance, but his license was suspended. The officer issued him a citation with a court date of Nov. 4. Because no one else was with the driver, the vehicle was impounded, and the driver left on foot.