Recommendation for Reducing Structural Racism

From the Anti-Racism Action Committee to Chair Michael Oskin
Department Earth and Planetary Sciences, University of California, Davis
October 14, 2020

Support positive mental health in the EPS community: Mental health resources

Proposed change: The proposed change is to normalize help-seeking behavior by offering yearly workshops from the UC Davis Student Health and Counseling Services.

***Purpose*:**

Race-based stereotypes, biases, and microaggressions communicate to Black people that they do not belong in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields. One effect is that Black college students are more likely to experience depression or other mental health crises and are 20% less likely to finish a four-year degree than their White counterparts. Thus, promoting positive mental health[††] in the EPS community is an anti-racist action.

The EPS department will host at least one public presentation per year on navigating mental health resources. This presentation will be facilitated, either in person or remotely, by UC Davis Student Health and Counseling Services and Each Aggie Matters personnel.

[††]From the World Health Organization, positive mental health is "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response

Timeline:

The first of these workshops has been scheduled as a Friday Lunch Seminar in early Winter Quarter (January 8 or 15, 2021). After this workshop, the ARAC will poll graduate and undergraduate students to determine 1) if they found it useful, 2) if they would like other workshops on different mental health topics (Each Aggie Matters offers workshops on several topics), and 3) how often these workshops should be offered.

***Audience*:**

This change is focused on the mental well-being of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) undergraduate and graduate students in the EPS community. The goal is to normalize positive mental health care, which can benefit all EPS community members regardless of race or ethnicity.

The workshops will be scheduled by the graduate student in charge of Friday Lunch Seminars.

***Background*:**

Race-based stereotypes, biases, and microaggressions communicate to Black undergraduate and graduate students that they do not belong in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields. Most of the research into the success of Black college students points to students' resiliency, or ability to succeed despite the toxic environment (McGee and Stovall, 2016; McGee and Bentley, 2017). However, the focus on resilience fails to acknowledge the effects such an environment can have on a student's well-being. The constant need to prove oneself results in "battle fatigue" and trauma on top of the typical stress of obtaining a college education (McGee and Stovall, 2016; McGee and Bentley, 2017). The effect is that Black students are more likely to experience depression or other mental health crises and are 20% less likely to finish a four-year degree than their White counterparts (Lynch and Engle, 2010; Boyraz et al., 2016). Furthermore, a recent report shows that attrition rates amongst underrepresented minority (URM) students pursuing PhDs is as high as 47% in the physical and mathematical sciences (Sowell et al., 2015). Despite this, Black college students are less likely to seek mental health treatment than White college students (Alang, 2019; Masuda, 2012; Mushonga, 2020).

A recent survey found that the most common reasons for not seeking mental treatment amongst the Black community are: cost, stigma, minimization (i.e. do not think treatment is necessary), low-perceived effectiveness, and accessibility barriers (Alang, 2019). Stigma and minimization are barriers particularly prevalent among the most highly-educated people surveyed. Within the university setting, the issues of cost and accessibility are largely taken care of by the availability of free resources on campus for all students who know where to access them. For Black college students, the strongest barriers were determined to be mental-health stigma and "self-concealment", or the tendency to withhold personal or embarrassing information (Masuda et al., 2012).

As a department, we have committed to promoting diversity within Earth and Planetary Sciences, and that means supporting the well-being of underrepresented students. We are able to inform our students of the mental health resources available to them and address barriers to help-seeking behaviors such as stigma. We can do this by normalizing help-seeking behaviors and promoting a growth mindset. The university has a wealth of mental health resources available (for example, see the Resources for racial trauma page), but many students may not know they exist or feel stigmatized when seeking help. The strategy recommended here is to host yearly workshops/webinars/seminars provided by the Student Health and Counseling

Services to help members of our community navigate the mental health resources on campus. By providing this information on a yearly basis (at least), we will ensure that all of our community members are informed and all of the information is up to date. It will also send a message that positive mental health is a priority for EPS, and will hopefully provide an environment for our students, postdocs, faculty and staff to thrive.

Models:

There is some flexibility in how this will be implemented. The first seminar of this kind is already scheduled for a Friday Lunch Talk in early Winter quarter (January 8 or 15, 2021). Following this, the ARAC will poll the students to see how best to move forward. Each Aggie Matters, a mental health initiative at UCD, has workshops already prepared to cover a variety of topics (https://eachaggiematters.ucdavis.edu/request-program). We can take advantage of any of those if students are interested, and EAM will prepare presentations to cover any topics of interest as long as there is sufficient notice.

Examples:

Faculty were recently invited to attend a webinar on mental health resources provided by the Student Health and Counseling Services and Each Aggie Matters. This seminar will be similar, but will focus on topics of interest to our students (e.g. navigating mental health resources on campus, stress management tools, recognizing signs of distress in others for TAs).

Evaluation:

After the first workshop, the ARAC will poll graduate and undergraduate students to determine 1) if they found it useful, 2) if they would like other workshops on different mental health topics (Each Aggie Matters offers workshops on several topics), and 3) how often these workshops should be offered. An ARAC member will review this poll and evaluate how best to move forward.

Affordances and Limitations:

Workshops on mental health resources and topics are freely provided by the UC Davis Student Health and Counseling Services. The only constraint is that someone needs to schedule this workshop yearly, and provide the presenters with enough lead time to prepare a presentation on the topics of interest. This will fall to the graduate student in charge of scheduling Friday Lunch talks.

References

Alang, S. M. (2019). Mental health care among blacks in America: Confronting racism and constructing solutions. *Health Services Research. ***54**, 346-355. doi: 10.1111/1475-6773.13115.

Boyraz, G. et al. (2016). Depressive symptomatology and college persistence among African American college students. *Journal of General Psychology. **143***, 144-160. DOI: 10.1080/00221309.2016.1163251.

Lynch, M., & Engle, J. (2010). Big gaps, small gaps: Some colleges and universities do better than others in graduating African American students. *The Education Trust*. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED511866.pdf

Masuda, A., Anderson, P. L. and Edmonds, J. (2012). Help-seeking attitudes, mental health stigma, and self-concealment among African American college students. *Journal of Black Studies*. **43**, 773-786. DOI: 10.1177/0021934712445806.

McGee, E.O. and Stovall, D. (2016). Black students and mental health: An emerging, unseen crisis. *Insight into Diversity.*

McGee, E. O., and Bentley, L. (2017). The troubled success of Black women in STEM. *Cognition and Instruction.* **35**, 265-289. DOI: 10.1080/07370008.2017.1355211.

Mushonga, D. R. (2020). The Glass Is Half Full: The Need to Promote Positive Mental Health in Black College Students, *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, DOI: 10.1080/87568225.2020.1727804.

Sowell, R., Allum, J., and Okahana, H. (2015). Doctoral Initiative on Minority Attrition and Completion. Washington, DC: Counsel of Graduate Schools Report.