Data Dashboards to Promote Student Health and Success

Growth in the number of students seeking services at counseling centers across the country is more than five times the rate of growth of institutional enrollment. These trends have left college campuses struggling to meet the demand for comprehensive well-being support.[1] Universities both small and large report suicides, sexual assaults, and substance use. As schools grapple with these challenges, it's becoming increasingly clear that new solutions are required.

Colleges and universities collect a staggering amount of data regarding the health and well-being of the students they serve across multiple campus departments and services, including but not limited to health and wellness centers, counseling services, disability services, on-campus clinics, and case managers. Yet, due to silos and disconnection between the many services provided on any given campus, many clinicians report that they find it difficult to use, and sometimes even gain access to, this vast data to collaboratively and comprehensively address students' issues.
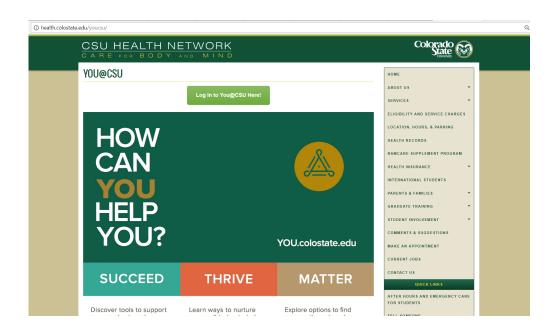
These trends point to an important opportunity and challenge: *colleges and universities need to leverage data regarding their students in order to support student mental health and success more effectively.* In this brief, we discuss promising developments and key challenges to overcome in this area.

New Efforts to Build and Use a Data Dashboard

As an example of a promising development, since 2015 Grit Digital Health has worked with Colorado State University to pilot a student well-being portal, called YOU at College. YOU at College connects students to online and campus resources across three domains of college success: Succeed (academic and career), Thrive (mental and physical health) and Matter (meaning and campus connections). The portal instantly curates a set of resources for students, connecting them to information, campus resources, peers and opportunities, based on their responses. 87% of student users reported increasing their awareness of campus resources, and 76% reported that their interaction with the portal helped them manage their stress. [2]

YOU at College also provides a dashboard for campus administrators and professionals, allowing them to view aggregate data regarding students' usage of the site in real-time.

Aggregate user data provides these practitioners knowledge about central issues on campus, while maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of students. Campus practitioners can access this valuable data in real-time, enabling the specific allocation of time and resources to be devoted to the most pressing campus issues. This can inform the development of outreach efforts, as well as programming for specific populations.

Recommendations and Questions for Mental Health Researchers and Practitioners

We propose that the ideal dashboard would include the following features:

1. Ability for students to look at their own measures over time (e.g., academic and health), as a way to reflect on their own well-being and experience.

2. Ability for students to opt in or out of sharing data.

3. Connection of students with on- and off-campus resources in relation to the experiences they report via the portal.

4. Ability for practitioners to track significant changes in wellness outcomes in relation to specific campus initiatives/programming and critical college experiences (e.g., first-year orientation, exam times, end-of-semester, internship/job searching). This would allow practitioners to not only track trends over time but also see potential underlying causes and influencing factors.

5. Customization by campus, allowing the dashboard to fit with the institution's strategic wellness goals and objectives and to track and measure progress towards those goals in real-time and long-term.

These features would collectively offer exciting opportunities, but raise important questions about feasibility. Some of these questions are listed below.

● What are the financial and organizational implementation costs required to implement a fully functional data dashboard? How can we make the economic case for this level of college/university investment?
● What would a dashboard have to look like to be appealing to students? What would students want to see about themselves and their communities? How can their privacy concerns be addressed?
● How can we build on existing data dashboard efforts to ensure a holistic approach that is equally and adequately academic-, wellness-, and student-focused?

We encourage stakeholders--including campus practitioners, administrators, students, and others--to engage in discussions of these issues in the interest of realizing the exciting opportunities ahead.

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