Self-Assessed Emotional Health Among First-Year Students at Our Great University: A Trend Analysis

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INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE AND CONTEXT

There is broad consensus nationally and internationally among many educational stakeholders that a troubling number of today’s youth too often manifest a variety of unstable emotional health symptoms and conditions, particularly as they transition from secondary to higher education (Wells & Graf, 2011). These stakeholders include college faculty, administrators, staff, parents, researchers and the students themselves (Pryor, Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, & & Graf, 2007). Many of the stakeholders have observed that the proportions of students arriving at their colleges and universities today presenting detrimental emotional conditions are greater than in previous years (Featherman, 2004). Not only has the prevalence increased, but also has the nature of the conditions with regard to severity. Consistent with these national observations (CAS, 2009), the Counseling Services at Our Great University (OGU), a mid-sized urban HBCU located in the northeast region of the country, has also described a degree of this troubling state of affairs on its campus. Archer & Cooper (1998) and others have pointed out that the effects of these conditions are understandably reflected to some varying degrees in retention and graduation rates, career success, relationships, and unfortunately in the least desirable of all outcomes, as reflected in mortality statistics (i.e., student suicide rates).

DATA ANALYSES

As indicated in Figure 3, valid models, both with positive slopes, are observed for the OGU R²=0.72, F(1,27)=128.88, p<0.01 and the HERI National R²=0.59, F(1,27)=78.74, p<0.01 cohorts. Trends of increasing percentages of first year students reporting experience with feelings of being overwhelmed are trending upward for the period of observation at OGU and within the National sample. The R squared values are substantive. The t-test indicated difference in the OGU and National slopes, r=2.83, p<0.01, with the OGU percentages having increased more steeply.

Figure 4 presents that, despite the appearance of the regression lines, a valid model is not present, indicating that no trends have been observed for the OGU or the HERI National sample in the percentages of students reporting the experience of feeling depressed during the period of observation. The regression lines are essentially flat for both groups on this measure.

Figure 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings essentially confirm similar trends in the CIRP-TFS data on emotional health self-ratings and reports of related feelings of being overwhelmed among OGU students and their counterparts nationally over the course of the last 28 years. It is troubling that while proportions of positive (above average) student ratings of their own emotional health are trending downward, those related to the feeling of being overwhelmed are trending upward. Self-reports of frequent depressive symptoms experienced while in the senior year of high school have not trended over the same period of time for either comparison group. These assessment findings have supported steps to address related emotional health challenges across incoming students taken by OGU Student Affairs and Support Services, as well as prompted consideration of further actions to be taken by these campus resources. Additional research focused on the sources and effects of feeling overwhelmed, experienced students as they enter elementary and throughout secondary school years, will likely help stakeholders in more effectively addressing related problems as students from the targeted contexts prepare for college.

LIMITATIONS

OGU response rates are below 60%. Survey respondents were self-selected. There are normal limitations of self-report data.

REFERENCES


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