



TO: James B. Milliken, Chancellor, U. T. System Administration
FROM: The U. T. System Student Advisory Council
DATE: April 27th, 2020
RE: Letter of Support for the Continuation of U. T. System Mental Health Initiatives

The U. T. System Student Advisory Council would like to extend to the Board of Regents a letter of support and further recommendation regarding the emphasis placed on student mental health. The mental health and student safety funding approved by the Board of Regents in February 2018 was timely in its delivery of essential resources to students across the System. The U. T. System has been a consistent leader in efforts to combat the rise in mental health concerns for students and faculty alike, efforts which have not gone unnoticed by the student population. The Board of Regents' emphasis on mental health has elevated the priority of the student mental health at institutions across the board. Below are just a few examples of resources made available through funding by the U. T. System Board of Regents for which students find particularly valuable:

- Thrive @ UT – Developed initially at U. T. Austin, this app has since launched Systemwide. The application interface encourages students to take steps toward improving overall wellness and wellbeing.
- Therapy Assisted Online – online modules for developing successful relationship and communication skills and mechanisms for coping with anxiety, stress, and depression.
- After-hours crisis counseling available to all students at U. T. institutions.

In light of the 2018 Board funding for mental health coming to an end, we recommend an assessment be conducted on the success of the funded initiatives. We recommend establishing a new Mental Health Task Force to identify the effectiveness of these programs, and to make recommendations for additional support at either the System or institutional level. This task force should identify opportunities for putting in place new services and resources, in addition to enhancing existing programs, and focus on supporting targeted groups, including graduate and professional students. The report should be published and made publicly available on the website.

Some of the topics we believe should be addressed by the proposed Mental Health Task Force include:

- Total number of in-person counselors and other mental health staff on each campus, with utilization rates.

- Total number of virtual counselors or mental health staff (teletherapy) and utilization rates.
- The number of trauma-informed counselors at each institution specifically for sexual assault survivors, to include sufficiency for student needs and compliance with International Accreditation of Counseling Services.
- The necessity of alternative hours counseling for students unavailable during traditional business hours, such as practicing professional/health students and working students.
- Communication platforms and strategies for informing students of resources and decreasing stigma.
- Communication with faculty members about the issue of mental health to encourage best practices when encountering such issues with colleagues and students.
- Identifying new and ongoing mental health initiatives to fund at the System level.

Following the findings of the proposed Mental Health Task Force, we strongly recommend the continued funding of successful mental health resources for students, faculty, and staff. Furthermore, we recommend prioritizing available funds to meet the greatest needs as identified by the task force. Mental health maintenance continues to be of high importance to students at U. T. institutions, and we hope that the Board of Regents will continue to share that priority.

Thank you for your consideration.