

# CLIMBING THE IVORY TOWER: BARRIERS TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

Presented by The CAFÉ TA Center

[www.cafetacenter.net](http://www.cafetacenter.net)



THE IVORY TOWER: WHY CLIMB IT?

- ▶ Personal – higher education is an important part of developing a meaningful and personally fulfilling career.
- ▶ Economic – higher education is strongly correlated with greater lifetime earnings.
- ▶ Societal – supporting the inclusion of people with mental health needs in higher education increases equity by making the campus community better reflect the greater society.

*“Since educational attainment is strongly correlated with employment outcomes, such as unemployment and wage earnings, it is imperative that these students get the support needed for educational success.”*

**Supported Education (SEd): State of the Practice -**  
<http://escholarship.umassmed.edu/pib/vol13/iss9/1/>

# BENEFITS OF HIGHER EDUCATION



WHAT MAKES CAMPUS MENTAL  
HEALTH DIFFERENT?



# COLLEGE MENTAL HEALTH IS UNIQUE

- ▶ Transition is difficult age for everyone
  - ▶ Stress of living independently, maintaining academic performance (more so for grad students) and finding social network (more so for undergrad students)
  - ▶ Many MH issues can manifest during typical college-age years
  - ▶ Each campus is its own society – each one has its own culture
  - ▶ Colleges operate by their own rules and guidelines
  - ▶ University as parent – *in loco parentis*
- 

## K-12 System

- ▶ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act applies
- ▶ Public schools must provide a “free and accessible public education”
- ▶ Accommodations are a requirement
- ▶ Specific plans laid out in IEP documents
- ▶ Parents play an important role

## Higher Education

- ▶ Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act apply
- ▶ Physical access required, and discrimination illegal
- ▶ Educational accommodations not mandated
- ▶ Less parent involvement – school may act *in loco parentis*

- ▶ Colleges and universities are struggling to deal with the **demand** for mental health services – some schools resort to wait lists
- ▶ Colleges and universities **lack resources and expertise** to act as caregivers or service providers
- ▶ **Knowledge** of the issue **is uneven** across schools and within faculties and administrations
- ▶ Major concerns about **liability** lead some schools to force students off campus or out of university housing
- ▶ **Community colleges** are less well-equipped to deal with mental health needs of their students

## CHALLENGES & BARRIERS: THE COLLEGE'S PERSPECTIVE

- ▶ According to American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment, 33-40% of young adults have BH issue
- ▶ Data from UMass Medical School indicates that 86% of higher education students with mental health needs drop out of school
- ▶ People in the 18-24 age group are least likely to seek help
- ▶ More than 30 percent of students say they have felt so depressed in the past year "that it was difficult to function," according to the American College Health Association, and more than half have felt "overwhelming anxiety."
- ▶ Stigma/discrimination remains a complicated and intractable social problem
- ▶ Students with SMHC also experience low grade point averages (GPAs), poor attendance, and highest course failure and expulsion/suspension rates among all students with disabilities

## CHALLENGES & BARRIERS: THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

## AN EXTRA MOUNTAIN TO CLIMB



Thanks to BRSS TACS and the Center for Social Innovation for these insights!

- ▶ Heightened rates of behavioral health conditions, but are often less likely than their peers to seek help as young adults
- ▶ More likely to experience homelessness and other socioeconomic challenges that can derail their educational plans, including criminal justice system involvement
- ▶ Strained or minimal familial or social support networks, resulting in less of a safety net when they encounter difficulties at school

## UNIQUE CHALLENGES: STUDENTS TRANSITIONING FROM YOUTH-SERVING SYSTEMS

- ▶ Impact of racism on behavioral health is well-documented
- ▶ Students of color (including African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and Native Americans), and male students of color in particular, are dramatically underrepresented across college communities
- ▶ Students of color report feeling overwhelmed by financial and family responsibilities, difficulty bridging home and college communities, and intense pressure to succeed and share the benefits of their success with their extended family or community
- ▶ Students of color at majority-white institutions can also feel isolated and out of place

## UNIQUE CHALLENGES: STUDENTS OF COLOR

- ▶ Many veterans who attend college are often older and are more likely to have families and live off-campus, separating them from on-campus life and activities
- ▶ More likely to be employed full-time while in school
- ▶ May have service-related injuries or medical conditions
- ▶ Can experience “culture shock” between military and campus environments

## UNIQUE CHALLENGES: VETERANS

- ▶ Sexual minority populations have elevated rates of mental health conditions and substance use disorders according to research
- ▶ Combination of identity development, discrimination, and strained family relationships, along with typical academic pressure, threatens wellness
- ▶ LGBTQ students may face discrimination that negatively impacts mental health

## UNIQUE CHALLENGES: LGBTQ STUDENTS

- ▶ Heightened sense of stress associated with a lack of cultural, social, and financial capital to support their transition to college life
- ▶ Reduced course loads or leaves of absence may not be possible for students with specific need-based scholarships or limited timeframes for attending school
- ▶ May struggle to meet their survival needs, and need to prioritize allocating scant resources (including time) toward transportation, coursework, and jobs instead of activities that support their recovery and wellness

## UNIQUE CHALLENGES: ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED/FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS



- ▶ Probation or parole requirements can limit full participation in campus life, present challenges accessing financial aid, create barriers to accessing employment and housing, and make it difficult to establish new support networks
- ▶ Lack of campus resources available to advise students with criminal justice histories
- ▶ Social isolation and lack of supports

## UNIQUE CHALLENGES: STUDENTS WITH CRIMINAL JUSTICE HISTORIES

# SUPPORTED EDUCATION PROGRAMS: A PATH FORWARD TO OVERCOME BARRIERS



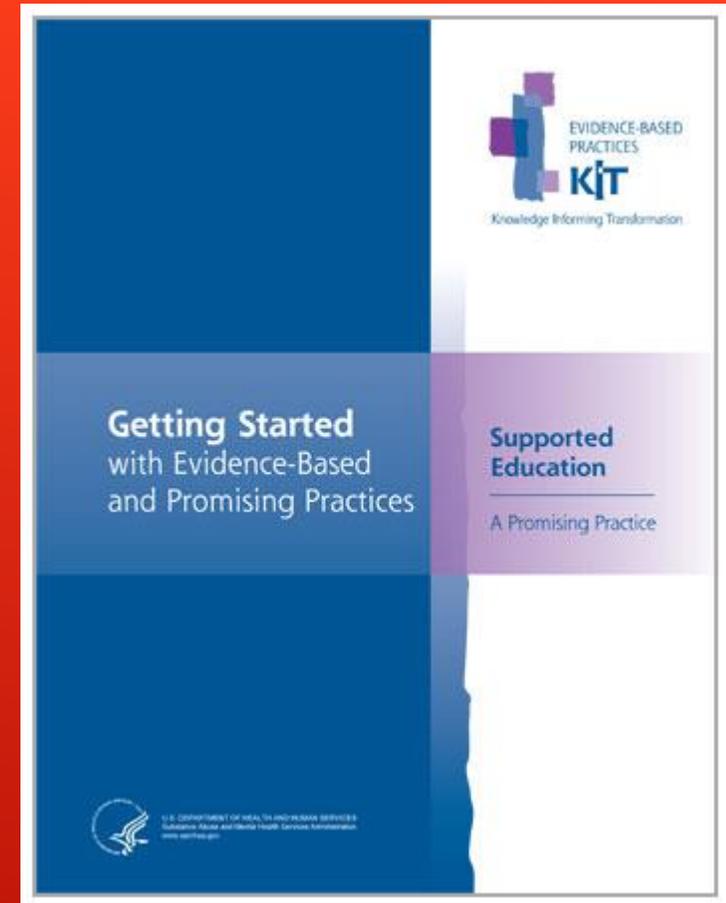
Supported education is the process of helping consumers of mental health services participate in an education program so they may receive the education and training they need to achieve their learning and recovery goals and become gainfully employed in the job or career of their choice.

SUPPORTED EDUCATION



- ▶ Provides supports to assist people with psychiatric disabilities to take advantage of skill, career, education and interpersonal development opportunities within an integrated academic environment.
- ▶ Creates community partnerships made up of mental health consumers, family members, agencies, providers and colleges with the intention of pooling resources to maximize educational opportunities and employment outcomes for persons with psychiatric disabilities.

# SUPPORTED EDUCATION

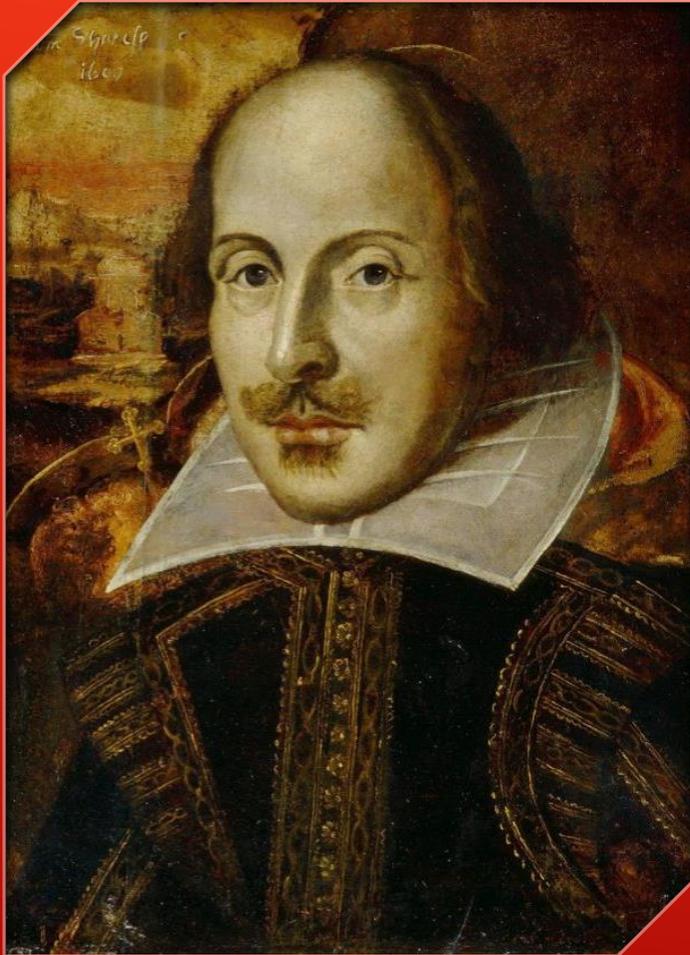


# Common Components of SEd Programs

1. Specialized staff with a dedicated effort to SEd
2. Counseling for careers and educational goals
3. Facilitating financial aid
4. Skill building for educational success
5. Facilitating educational enrollment and retention including acquiring educational accommodations
6. Information about rights and resources
7. Mental health support
8. Coordination with post-secondary education institutions
9. Accessing supplemental educational supports
10. And providing general supports regarding other non-education specific barriers and life stressors

**Supported Education (SEd): State of the Practice -**

<http://escholarship.umassmed.edu/pib/vol13/iss9/1/>



“What's in a name? that which we call  
a rose  
By any other name would smell as  
sweet;”

- Romeo & Juliet. Act II. Scene II.

- ▶ the Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, which exists to “protect and advance the rights of adults and children who have mental disabilities,” has put forward a model policy that universities and colleges can look to as a roadmap for creating their own policies and procedures.
- ▶ Bazelon’s model policy offers 48 specific policy tenants

# A MODEL POLICY



- ▶ **a promise to counter stigma**
- ▶ **emphasis on suicide prevention**
- ▶ **encouragement for students to seek help and a promise of confidentiality**
- ▶ **appropriate accommodations**
- ▶ **avoiding punitive actions or discrimination**

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

## KEY POLICY TENETS

### **Counseling / MH Services**

- ▶ Readily available, voluntary, and peer-run

### **Confidentiality**

- ▶ Student drives process, involvement of others up to student

### **Leaves of Absence**

- ▶ A last resort, treated same as physical health absences, with a committee including students to decide on re-entry

### **Disciplinary Action**

- ▶ Never a pretext for discrimination, not to be used for suicidal or self-injurious behavior

### **Education on MH**

- ▶ Universally available across campus, and part of orientation

## Recommendations overlap with what CAFÉ TAC learned first-hand in Utah – see that video at

<http://cafetacenter.net/2015/02/cafe-tac-video-supported-education-at-the-university-of-utah/>



- ▶ A coordinated approach is key – one house, many doors
- ▶ Collaboration across offices and academic departments is imperative
- ▶ Students listen to students when it comes to open dialogue and culture shifts
- ▶ Culture must be bottom-up, driven by students, and top-down, with administrative buy-in
- ▶ Ideal system should include and recognize importance of health and wellness for all students and have a continuum of services from shallow (awareness, prevention) to deep (accommodations, counseling)
- ▶ Larger institutions often have “deeper” services, but even the largest can only do so much
- ▶ Social supports can be as essential as programmatic supports
- ▶ The onus is on the student to make the first move, so being pro-active is essential

Things to consider in searching for the right environment to support both mental wellness and academic success



KNOW  
YOURSELF

KNOW YOUR  
SCHOOL

KNOW YOUR  
ACCOMODATIONS

KNOW YOUR  
RESOURCES



- ▶ What learning environment works best for you?
- ▶ What makes you uncomfortable?
- ▶ What supports do you need?
- ▶ What has helped in the previous learning environments, such as high school?
- ▶ What are your strengths?

**Answering questions like these will help you create a plan BEFORE you decide how, where, and what to study.**

**KNOW YOURSELF**

- ▶ Every campus has its own unique culture around mental health; see how much you can learn about it ahead of time
- ▶ Talk to students, faculty, disability services offices, and counseling centers at schools you are considering
- ▶ Find out about campus groups that address mental health
- ▶ Find out about campus groups that support people like you
- ▶ What policies are in place around mental health?
- ▶ Does the school provide a supported education program or similar services under another name?

## KNOW YOUR SCHOOL

- ▶ Accommodations are changes in *how* you learn – a different way of achieving the same result.
- ▶ What accommodations work for you? Some of the many possibilities:
  - ▶ Arranging to sit in a specific place in class to reduce distraction or anxiety
  - ▶ Extended or broken-up time for in-class work, tests, projects, and/or homework
  - ▶ Reduced course loads
  - ▶ Information in different formats (recorded audio, written notes, visual presentations, etc.)
  - ▶ Opportunities to work from home
  - ▶ Permission to drop courses when needed
  - ▶ Flexibility in terms of rooming situations
  - ▶ Alternative housing that still allows for participation in all aspects of campus life

# KNOW YOUR ACCOMMODATIONS



- ▶ Do you have a plan that outlines your needs?
- ▶ Therapist/counseling center
- ▶ Support group or student peer support
- ▶ Friends, peers, family members, other natural supports that you can turn to beyond the campus community
- ▶ Go beyond the campus and identify resources in the surrounding community

KNOW YOUR RESOURCES

- ▶ Have a plan
- ▶ Know what to look for
- ▶ Advocate for yourself
- ▶ Find the right fit
- ▶ Succeed!



- ▶ **Mental Health on College Campuses: Investments, Accommodations Needed to Address Student Needs -**  
<https://ncd.gov/publications/2017/mental-health-college-campuses-investments-accommodations-needed-address-student>
- ▶ **Outside-The-Box College Accommodations: Real Support for Real Students: Tools for School II -**  
<http://escholarship.umassmed.edu/pib/vol14/iss3/1/>
- ▶ **Real Support for Real Students: Making College Accommodations Work For You -**  
[http://www.umassmed.edu/globalassets/transitionsrtc/publications/ppal\\_college-accommodations.pdf](http://www.umassmed.edu/globalassets/transitionsrtc/publications/ppal_college-accommodations.pdf)

## RESOURCES

- ▶ **Transitions RTC** – exists to “to promote the full participation in socially valued roles of transition-age youth and young adults (ages 14-30) with serious mental health conditions.”  
<http://www.umassmed.edu/transitionsrtc>
- ▶ **Active Minds** – “empowers students to change the perception about mental health on college campuses.”  
<http://www.activeminds.org/>
- ▶ **Jed Foundation** – “exists to protect emotional health and prevent suicide for our nation's teens and young adults.”  
<https://www.jedfoundation.org/>

## RESOURCES



# CAFÉ TA CENTER

A Program of The Family Café

Select Language ▼

[HOME](#) [ABOUT CAFÉ TA CENTER](#) [THE FOCUS NEWSLETTER](#) [TAC TRAINING](#) [OUTSIDE RESOURCES](#) [CONTACT US](#)

## Supported Education

Supported education is the process of helping consumers of mental health services participate in an education program so they may receive the education and training they need to achieve their learning and recovery goals and become gainfully employed in the job or career of their choice. The Café TAC will provide technical assistance and resources on effective approaches to supported education programs such as coaching and accommodations and establish a national database of supported education programs including vocational rehabilitation.

[Click Here and Join Our Mailing List](#)

### PAGES

- [Disaster Planning and Recovery](#)
- [Organizational Sustainability](#)
- [Supported Education](#)
- [TAC Training](#)
- [The "Recovery Stories" Video Project](#)



Jeremy Countryman, Program Director  
[cafetacenter@gmail.com](mailto:cafetacenter@gmail.com)  
[cafetacenter.net/supported-education/](http://cafetacenter.net/supported-education/)