

Study reveals lowest reports of emotional health

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The emotional health of college freshmen has reached an all-time low, according to an annual study by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program.

"There are many days where I think to myself, 'What am I even doing here?' and that is a pretty stressful state of mind," **Brittany Curtis, a sophomore transfer student at UNC Asheville** said.

The first CIRP Freshman Survey in 1985 said about 64 percent of freshmen in college said their emotional health was normal or above average.

In the latest survey, only 51.9 percent of students report having a healthy emotional level.

"I feel like students might be more stressed nowadays," Curtis said. "Instead of college being an exciting and special occurrence, like a privilege, it is another thing that is expected of us."

Dr. Beverly Savinsky, the associate director of Health and Counseling at UNCA, said economics contribute to the pressure some students feel.

"Many students are beginning college already feeling stressed," she said. "They are facing the added challenges of economic downturn and increased academic pressure."

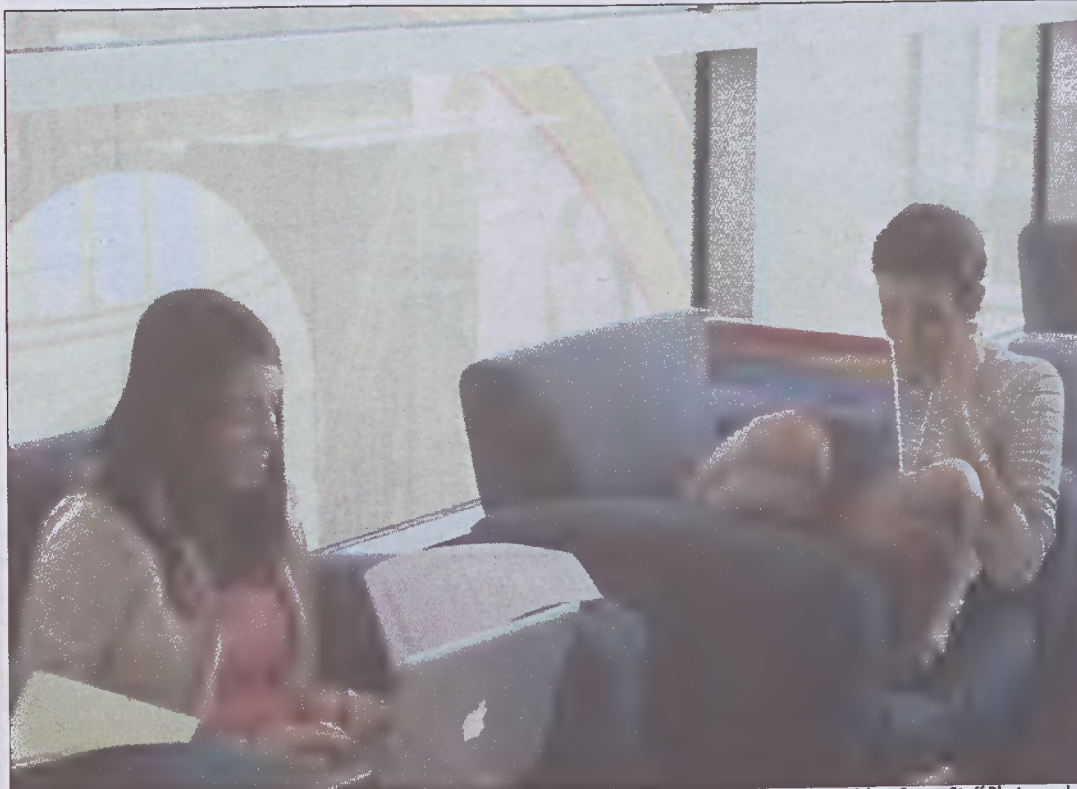
Savinsky said the emotional health of freshmen has dropped.

"I have experience in five counseling centers across the country and have definitely noticed an increase in both number of students presenting for services and severity of concerns," Savinsky said.

Savinsky said she believes students' low emotional health is connected to more than just financial and economic stressors.

"For most it seems to be a combination of factors: biological; financial; environmental and personal," Savinsky said. "Some people are genetically more prone toward depression and anxiety."

The survey showed about 53 percent of students pay for college with loans and about 74 percent use grants.



Adam Gross - Staff Photographer

Freshman Erin Kenyon, left, and sophomore Sarah Weaver study in the Pinnacle at Highsmith. According to a recent survey, 51.9 percent of college freshmen report low emotional health.

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"College is more expensive, parents are financially worse off than in previous years due to the recession and stagnant wages, and students are therefore starting college with more economic pressure than ever before," said **Melissa Himelein, a professor of psychology and the director of the Center for Teaching & Learning.**

According to Curtis, one reason college students feel stressed is because of the pressure placed on them in high school to go to college and pursue certain majors.

"Since we have to go through college, we're worried about paying for it, whether our parents will still love us when we choose to be an art major instead of pursuing business and trying to find a social niche at the same time," Curtis said.

Curtis also said another pressure entering college is finding friends and worrying you may not find any.

"Part of why I was feeling emotionally down was because it seemed like everyone else was happy, accepted and content, while I was not feeling the same way," Curtis said. "I'm sure other people felt the same way as I did, even if they kept

on a happy face."

The survey also discussed how women are more likely to have low emotional health than men by about 13 percent.

"Women were particularly prone to self-reported low levels of emotional health and feelings of being overwhelmed," Savinsky said.

Low emotional health can have negative effects on students and can affect them mentally and emotionally, according to Himelein.

"The relationship between stress and both mental and physical health is well-established,"

Himelein said. "Working too many hours creates stress, anxiety about money creates stress, worries about the future create stress and stress affects psychological well-being as well as physical health."

Savinsky agreed low emotional health can have negative effects on the health and social life of students.

"It's more difficult for them to focus," Savinsky said. "It impacts relationships. If someone is depressed or anxious, it's more difficult to form and maintain close relationships."

There are ways to cope with low emotional health and help make life less stressful, according to Himelein.

"Vigorous aerobic exercise is great for mood," Himelein said. "Sleep seven to eight hours a night on a regular schedule. Eat regular, healthful meals. Spend time with close friends."

Savinsky and Himelein both agreed spending time with friends and developing good relationships was a good way to help emotional levels.

"Humans are social beings," Savinsky said. "Get to know your roommate. Develop positive and healthy relationships with classmates and friends."

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possibility of two more, Fernandes said.

"We have not stopped (hiring) despite the budget reductions and I think that speaks volumes to the university's commitment to strong academic programs for our students," she said.

With the cuts already made, there could also be a possibility of the general administration asking for a 15 percent cut, according to Fernandes.

Fernandes said she tried to foster a level of communication between faculty and staff during this difficult time.

"We try to help them understand the kinds of decisions that we are needing to make," she said.

This level of communication will help foster a level of trust between faculty and staff and administration, according to Fernandes.

She said deciding any type of budget cut is a painful experience for everyone involved.

"It's very comparable to a family that has a budget and you can't spend more money than you take in," she said. "So, if they're spending more than they're taking in, they need to make some changes to live within their means. Basically the university needs to make some hard decisions about how to live within their means."

Despite the pain the university is experiencing due to budget cuts, Fernandes said she feels the university will emerge in a stronger position.

"The university kept adding more and more ideas to the curriculum and didn't really consider whether we have full-time faculty here to deliver it and that really isn't a sustainable model for the university to work with," she said. "So, what we're doing now, although it's very painful, will allow us to create a curriculum that our faculty can deliver whether we have a good budget or a bad budget. The university will be sustainable through whatever comes and, actually, that's a better position for the university to be in."