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Professors Discuss Mental Health Days at Meredith College

By Shae-Lynn Henderson, Staff Writer

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, mental health has become an increasingly important topic of conversation. According to the Mayo Clinic, around 30% of college students reported feeling depressed during 2021 and around 50% reported feeling "overwhelmingly anxious." Measures to improve student mental health have been discussed at universities around the country, and one popular idea is mental health days.

Dr. Betty-Shannon Prevatt, Assistant Professor of Psychology, noted that "neurocognitive science tells us that if you are emotionally taxed, your brain is not in a state to learn." She explained that during the early part of the pandemic, "resources like social support, family, routine exercise, stability of jobs and school were no longer accessible," meaning that people needed to find new ways of coping. She said she believes this is one reason for mental health days' rise in popularity.

Some professors at Meredith have implemented mental health days or similar opportunities for students in their courses. Dr. Prevatt said she has "always allowed two unexcused absences that do not detract from a student's grade...and allow students to care for themselves when the need arises." She noted that the psychology department also has bulletin

boards on the first floor of Ledford Hall including topics like "addressing resilience, growth mindsets and coping," and that psychology faculty also include mental health resources in their syllabi.

Lisa Pearce, Associate Professor of Art, said she has "tried to space [mental health days] out to fit two in [each] course," one before the midterm and one after.

"My first thought was to allow these days to be taken as needed throughout the semester," Professor Pearce said, "but my concern was how to adjust and get everyone up to speed if they are missing at various days throughout the semester. I am seeing this semester as a pilot for what works, and I'll reevaluate at the end of the semester based on student feedback."

Dr. Tim Hendrix, Associate Professor of Mathematics, does not have mental health days built into his syllabus but says he has "always encouraged students to find a healthy balance" between studying

and finding time for rest.

"I am not sure that planning for them in my syllabus is the most effective way, but other faculty may find that to be effective and important," Dr. Hendrix said. "At least, at this point, I would like to gauge what's going on in my class, and adjust to the students' needs in that moment. If I allow the content schedule to accommodate a mental health day on a certain

date, that may not be the date where such a day is needed.

Dr. Hendrix encouraged students to utilize the many campus resources Meredith College has to offer. "Meredith College is a small private liberal arts college with community as one of its hallmarks. Part of that community is that we care for and educate the whole person," he said.

Some Meredith students have called for universal mental health days to be instituted by the College. According to the college's

2021-2022 Academic Calendar, no college-wide mental health days have been scheduled.

"From the faculty perspective...I imagine mental health days are a difficult tool for an institution to administer if students want to retain a week-long spring break," Dr. Prevatt said. "If we were to formally add mental health days, I imagine this would mean extending the semester."

With this in mind, Dr. Prevatt stated that "mental health days are only one strategy to care for emotional wellness." To discuss mental health and emotional wellness, students can contact the Counseling Center by phone at (919) 760-8427 or by email at counselingcenter@meredith.edu.

"I cannot speak for the entire department," Dr. Hendrix concluded, "but I can say that all of my colleagues in the department have taken seriously the need for mental health awareness...Since COVID-19, I think that everyone—faculty, staff, students, literally everyone—have experienced so much stress that we are all more fragile emotionally and mentally, not just physically. People have dealt with so many traumatic things in our lives that it is no wonder we are all a bit more fragile, and thus, susceptible to mental health issues."

Student Research on Origin of Cornhuskin's Name

By Freya Dahlgren, Opinion Editor

Cornhuskin' is an annual tradition at Meredith with a racist history that has been a topic of discussion across campus in the past couple of years. Meredith student Camryn Way, '22, has been discussing her concerns with the origin of Cornhuskin' and its name with Dr. Daniel Fountain, Professor of History. *The Herald* reached out to Way for more information on Cornhuskin' and its history.

Way started off by acknowledging that she is "aware of the archives explaining what was 'meant' by the term Cornhuskin' originally." She explained that Doris Peterson, a former associate professor in the Physical Education Department, started the event on Oct. 30, 1945, where it was called the "Corn Huskin' Bee." This name remained for about a decade.

According to the Meredith College Archives, the original intentions behind Cornhuskin' were to have "Halloween themes and [to be] considered a Halloween/

fall celebration as well as a way to honor the freshmen."

However, Way explained that Cornhuskin's name ties back to American slavery. "Corn husking and/or shucking festivals date back into the late 18th century and were a way plantation owners sought to speed up the corn-husking process so that their slaves could return to work in the fields," she said. "Slaves were encouraged to compete—typically in teams—to see who could shuck the most corn on the plantation. Slaves then celebrated with a feast and a dance."

Way said she has issues with the use of Cornhuskin's name at Meredith for a few reasons. "Calling a festival 'Corn Huskin' has a similar feeling to having a cotton-picking festival once a year," she said. "The word itself is not, in its own right, distasteful, but it certainly should not be used in any way that references slavery."

"Another huge issue I take up with the use of this name is how

Meredith unintentionally hides its true meaning within the media. If you were to simply search 'Corn Huskin Festival' online, information about this widely known plantation festival is often hidden behind Meredith College's [Corn] huskin' information," Way said. "It can often take three to four pages of searching to actually find mention of the true connotations. Meredith College has contributed to burying...the meaning of this word."

Way has asked classmates if they know where the term Cornhuskin' comes from, and most "stated it was a festival at our school and something we 'had to experience'...not a single one of them had any idea of the alternative meaning to corn shucking festivals."

"It is genuinely appalling to me that in this era of social change and racial deconstruction, we are still utilizing words that had the meaning of shacking



Photo by Elinor Shelp-Peck