



**University of Maryland College Park
Fiscal Year 2022 Operating
Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis
March 4, 2021**

**House Education and Economic Development Subcommittee
Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair**

**Senate Education, Business and Administration Subcommittee
Senator Craig Zucker, Chair**

The President should comment on the effort to provide mental health services remotely and if there was an increase in demand and, if so, how was it accommodated.

Mental Health Trends

1. UMD's Counseling Center and University Health Center's Behavioral Health Services saw a combined decrease of 31% in total appointments and 41% in unique patients comparing Spring 2019 with Spring 2020, when UMD transitioned to fully virtual learning after Spring Break.
2. Collegiate mental health systems across the nation (including ours), have experienced a 25-30% reduction in the number of new students initiating treatment after the pandemic struck.
3. These units also saw a combined decrease of 28% in total appointments and 38% in unique patients comparing Fall 2019 with Fall 2020, when the campus re-opened at reduced on-site presence.
4. Interestingly, the Counseling Center saw an increase in individual therapy appointments during this same time - 18% increase comparing Spring 2019 with Spring 2020, and 8% increase comparing Fall 2019 with Fall 2020. Existing clients needed and received additional care, and new clients appeared to struggle with more acute and severe mental health issues.
5. Overall, the net volume was down due to a reduction in group therapy appointments and emergency assessments, as well as slowed rate of new clients.
6. The pivot to full tele-therapy in the Spring and continuing into the Fall was generally effective and students report positive satisfaction levels.

Explanation of Observed Mental Health Trends

The overall trend of a significant reduction in the number of students initiating and engaging in care on campus can be attributed to the following factors:

- Students experienced a significant amount of distress caused by academic issues such as loss of motivation, and a reduced ability to focus. In response, seeking out mental health care became a secondary priority for most students.
- Students were overwhelmed by non-academic demands related to family and home life, which caused students to put the decision to seek out care on hold.
- Students were living in a home environment, which may not be supportive of them seeking treatment for their mental health concerns, may not provide them a private space to participate in mental health treatment, and may lack a stable internet connection for tele-therapy services.
- The pandemic magnified racial and other disparities that already existed, making it even more difficult for those who needed it to access care.

Measures Taken to Address the Students Mental Health Needs

1. A quick transition to tele-health services was undertaken at the front end of the pandemic both at the Counseling Center and Behavioral Health Services for students living in the State of Maryland.

2. Intentional increase in outreach programming was undertaken to increase awareness of the impact of the pandemic on mental health. Outreach programming focused on providing psychoeducation about effective coping strategies to deal with the distress caused by the pandemic.
3. Individual therapy utilization has continued to increase year over year and is expected to continue into the Fall 2021 semester and beyond. Students consistently conveyed a very low tolerance for any wait time to treatment. Therefore, four part-time psychologists were hired at the Counseling Center to address the current and projected increase in utilization of individual therapy and to keep wait times for treatment at a minimum.
4. Assessment, support, consultation, and referral services for out-of-state students were developed and implemented.
5. Frequent messaging to the campus community and key stakeholders about the availability of tele-therapy services at both the offices.
6. Arranged for private therapy space at the Stamp Student Union to ensure that students on-campus continued to have private space for needed treatment.
7. Intentional messaging and connection with offices serving minority students through established partnerships to allow for communication about the availability of services and to establish a pathway for easy referral into care.
8. Development of the Exercise Referral Program in partnership with Recreation and Wellness to help clients improve their mental health and well-being through increased physical activity and exercise.

On-going Challenges

1. Provision of treatment to out-of-state students remains challenging given the complexity of laws and regulations governing the provision of mental health treatment across state lines.
2. Making students aware of available tele-therapy services on campus remains a priority given the frequent feedback from students that they are unaware of the availability of tele-therapy services on campus.
3. Reaching minority students, who appear to be seeking out care in lower numbers than their white counterparts, remains a priority and a challenge.

The President should also comment on how the shift to online and remote learning has changed thinking on the future UMCP business model.

UMD does not see online and remote learning as replacing the traditional residential college experience. However, innovations as a result of the pandemic will allow us to enhance the experience of our traditional programs with increased use of technology. We expect online learning to play a larger role in the future than it did before the pandemic.

An example of innovation in teaching involves a one-credit course with 100 students from Maryland, 75 from Mexico and 25 from New Zealand. This class features outstanding lecturers from the UN and WHO working under the School of Public Policy. This course would not have been possible in the pre-COVID environment, so we

anticipate some special learning opportunities involving students from other countries are now possible. Seminars that take advantage of guest lecturers are also greatly enhanced because they do not have to travel, saving money and carbon and increasing access to some of the best minds in the world.

Another potential benefit of these changes is that lectures are more accessible when recorded and captioned. This is particularly beneficial for non-native speakers, students in need of accommodations, as well as all students when reviewing course content. Pre-recorded (flipped) lectures can allow for more project-based learning, applied exercises and active engagement in class. Active learning supported by technology is easier to facilitate in large lecture classes. Increasing digital literacy for students through the use of academic technology for coursework enhances job competitiveness.

The move to online and remote learning has allowed UMCP to pilot the use of tele-work for some employees, especially those who do not regularly meet with students such as in the areas of administration and technology. In a pilot of this approach, expanded tele-work is being used in the IT division to avoid renting additional office space to accommodate a large multi-year project.

Even for student-facing staff, remote meetings with students are sometimes better conducted using video conferencing. For example, academic advisors have found routine advising meetings are more convenient and efficient when conducted via video conference rather than students having to travel to a designated office on campus for advising. Last spring, we initiated a process of improving the systems and processes for handling change of major requests and regular reviews of student progress. We anticipate that lessons learned and new ways of doing business necessitated by the pandemic could lead, in certain areas, to more cost-efficient delivery of services. Ultimately, we believe that UMD will continue to thrive as a residential in-person campus of the highest quality with enhanced use of technology where appropriate.