

# Moment on Mental Health

*After a year of Zoom classes, virtual coffee dates and socially distanced get-togethers, Penn State is tired. In the Collegian's 2021 mental health edition, we explore how students are coping with a global pandemic — on top of relationships, classes and extracurriculars.*



# Effects of COVID-19 on social interaction

By Olivia Estright  
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

For five days, Braden Ward sat alone in his dorm room. With no roommate and virtual learning, he said he saw no reason to leave.

Ward (freshman-public relations) is just one Penn State student facing the effects of social exclusion due to the coronavirus pandemic.

“If I had forced myself to go out during that time, I would’ve felt so much better,” Ward said.

According to psychology professor Michael Bernstein, Ward is right.

As a psychology professional, Bernstein conducted research regarding social exclusion and said when humans feel excluded, they derive a sense of fear and feel threatened to fix their current situation.

“When we feel excluded, we become really attuned to reading facial expressions. You become really good at telling when someone is lying,” Bernstein said. “Those are positive adaptive responses, but they serve the goal of reaffiliation.”

Bernstein mentioned the idea that other species have their own set of capabilities to help them survive — birds can fly, squirrels can run and hide, and tigers have claws. Humans have none of those to survive, so they rely on group living.

“We are social creatures,” Bernstein said. “From an evolutionary perspective, humans are not equipped to live by [themselves].”

This semester, all of Ward’s high school friends enrolled at Penn State stayed home. Ward said his experience meeting new people hasn’t been difficult, although there were times when he was uncomfortable.

“I don’t think it’s harder to express yourself to others, but I think it’s hard to find the right people to express yourself to,” Ward said. “Right now, I’m just very content with my own life.”

Bernstein said it’s normal to feel like the pandemic has made it more difficult to interact with others. He emphasized the need for students to reach out to their peers.

“Even though we are supposed to be physically distant from each other, so much of our social lives



Lily LaRegina/Collegian

Students have seen limited social interaction since the start of the pandemic, deteriorating their mental health.

rely on being physically close to other people,” Bernstein said. “So much of success in college, work and life is feeling that you belong and that there are people you can count on.”

As a professor of communications arts and sciences at Penn State, Timothy Worley focuses his research on the interaction within relationships. Regarding the coronavirus pandemic, Worley and Madison Mucci-Ferris, a student affairs professional at Southern Methodist University, conducted research on social support within families and romantic relationships.

Worley and Mucci-Ferris studied Relational Turbulence Theory, which focuses on how transitions in close relationships can create turbulence. Worley said the changes may “spark new questions or doubts about what the new normal is like.”

Worley said “chaos” in relationships is not something to fret about because issues created during the pandemic aren’t a direct indicator that “something is wrong with the relationship.”

“This isn’t so much of a reflection on [you] and [your] parents, perhaps, as much as it is a reflection on the pandemic,” Worley said.

Ward said it’s been hard to find the motivation to go out and meet new people because of the coronavirus protocols the university needs to follow — especially with

on-campus housing.

“I go through phases of wanting to talk to people and never wanting to talk to anyone ever again,” Ward said. “Obviously, I always want to meet new people, but with the limitations to my building, it’s just not easy.”

Ward lives in Stuart Hall in East, and he said the coronavirus mitigation protocol caused him to “struggle when it [came] to sharing basic human connection.”

Even though Ward had in-person classes during his first semester in the fall, he said he stopped going when some of them switched to hybrid learning.

“Since the room was so spaced out, I don’t think I spoke to a single person in my one class,” Ward said. “It was once a week, a mile away and posted on Zoom. It didn’t make sense for me to go in person.”

Ward said he didn’t join any clubs this year either, because he didn’t think they would be “worth it.”

“I just didn’t want to sit on Zoom calls, because I knew I wouldn’t get anything out of it,” Ward said.

As a junior, Alyssa Bielinski said she didn’t have much trouble this semester socializing because of her prior involvement in other activities.

“The way THON had adapted to still include everyone was the best,” Bielinski (junior-rehabilitation and human services) said. “I always tell freshmen that if they want to participate in something for the greater good and have a purpose here, join THON.”

Bielinski said she noticed that all clubs were changing the way they did things. However, she said for anyone struggling to find meaningful social interactions, students need to try to make the most out of the virtual experience.

“Even when things are normal, it’s so hard to be yourself around hundreds of new people,” Bielinski said. “I know

it sucks with everything being virtual, but at the end of the day if you reach out, then you are still going to make those connections.”

Bernstein said he wants people to acknowledge that this is a difficult time, but they shouldn’t give up all hope.

“I think we’re coming to a point

“Even though we are supposed to be physically distant from each other, so much of our social lives rely on being physically close to other people.”

Michael Bernstein  
Psychology professor



Graphic by Lizzie Bourque/Collegian Creative

## PSU students reflect on mental health while COVID-positive

By Phoebe Cykosky  
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Every isolation experience is different — though some students believe their mental health wasn’t a priority throughout their sickness.

After contracting coronavirus, some students found their peers checked in more on their physical well-being instead of their mental health while they were isolating.

Karlie Daschbach spent her time in isolation in Eastview Terrace during her first semester at Penn State in the fall and found that she struggled the most with feeling a range of emotions and lack of focus in general.

Daschbach (freshman-communication sciences and disorders) said a lot of mental strain she felt was caused by making others have to go into isolation when she tested positive.

“There was a lot of guilt that came to me when I tested positive because then my roommate and two other friends had to go into isolation even though they stayed negative,” she said. “They kept saying that it wasn’t my fault, but I knew that it really was.”

Daschbach also felt “mentally foggy” throughout her time in isolation, which made it hard for her to stay motivated for exams she took while having coronavirus. She said her mental health and focus didn’t get better until about two weeks after she was out of isolation.

Daschbach said she wished she was able to have time to walk outside isolated when she was in Eastview Terrace because it “felt like a prison.”

Another student, Ali Bhallo, said he was “lucky” to have his three roommates in isolation with him in his apartment at the Meridian on College Avenue to give more mental stability.

Bhallo (sophomore-supply chain management) said they were able to come up with games to help them pass the time and keep their minds preoccupied.

“We invented our new sport of balloon ball,” Bhallo said. “Basically, we just had to keep the ball up as long as possible, which should be the next fastest growing sport in America.”

However, he also felt “a lack of focus and lack of energy” throughout isolation, which made school work more difficult.

“We didn’t know the mental symptoms or if that was something that a lot of people went through, because no one really talks about it,” Bhallo said. “We just thought that we were all being unproductive, so mentally it wasn’t great.”

Katelynn Powell agreed that having the coronavirus while isolated in her downtown apartment during the fall semester for 20 days impacted her mental health.

Powell (senior-corporate innovation and entrepreneurship) said she felt conflicting feelings of worrying about herself, spreading the virus and general anxiety

from the whole experience.

“My biggest concern was worrying about how I can make sure I don’t give this to anyone else while I was also concerned about my own health,” she said. “I had to make sure I was telling everyone that I was okay — like my parents — even though I was scared about what was going on.”

However, she said distractions helped her avoid thinking about mental health concerns. She spent time painting, doing school work and applying for jobs.

“The motivation was to get my mind off the fact that I had coronavirus, but my isolation was during the career fair, so I actually ended up getting a job during the time,” Powell said.

Powell said she found that mental health issues were something many people were “not comfortable” talking about when it comes to coronavirus and isolation.

“It’s easy to just say to be positive, but when you’re going through mental health issues, sometimes it can feel like you can’t get out,” she said. “The best thing that you can do is to just feel through your emotions and reach out to people that you love when you’re feeling mentally and physically isolated.”

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## Mental Health Resources

### You@PSU

Student personal wellness portal

[you.psu.edu](https://you.psu.edu)

### Virtual CAPS

Student counseling resources

[bit.ly/2OcxazN](https://bit.ly/2OcxazN)

### PSU Crisis Line

24/7 student crisis support

(877) 229-6400

Text “LIONS” to 741741

### Centre Helps

24/7 immediate crisis support

(814) 237-5855

### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

(800) 273-8255

where the proverbial daylight is ahead of us,” Bernstein said.

If a student were to struggle with a sense of belonging, Worley said they should be aware of what kind of support they need.

“When people feel more turbulence in a relationship, they [are] less likely to seek support,” Worley said. “It becomes a cycle, though, because the ones who need the support the most are the ones that are not seeking it.”

Worley said although there are many different types of support, he noticed esteem support seemed the most relevant to today’s students. According to Worley, esteem support comes from a “hit” to a person’s overall sense of competence because they’re in a stressful situation.

“You can start to doubt yourself,” Worley said. “These students might really benefit from just letting their parents know they need a pep talk.”

Bernstein said students should continue reaching out and getting involved — whether it is talking to other students, attending virtual events set up by student affairs or just reaching out to professors.

“Part of what we all think about going to college is having fun with new people,” Bernstein said. “While these are potentially risky behaviors, there’s a risk in not engaging in them as well.”

Since this is his first year at Penn State, Ward said he picked up on cues when meeting new people, learning to “ignore all fear and anxiety.”

“It takes a lot of energy to ignore what your brain is telling you to do,” Ward said. “If you don’t make the move to meet new people, nothing is going to change. You have to take the initiative for yourself.”

Worley said he would encourage students to seek support in order to subside feelings of anxiety, depression and stress.

“Some of the things that can seem particularly challenging like asking for support, might be the things that you need to do,” Worley said. “Be willing to push through the discomfort or the challenge in order to realize that there can be good things on the other side.”

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# Wellness days: For work or mental health?

By Ella Castronuovo  
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Spring break is a staple of the college experience, providing a getaway for Penn State students in the middle of the spring semester. The week typically allows time for decompressing from schoolwork and classes.

In an attempt to limit student travel amid the coronavirus pandemic, Penn State announced on Oct. 4, 2020 there would be no spring break this academic year.

Instead, the university delayed the start of the spring semester by one week to allow for students to complete their pre-arrival coronavirus testing. In addition, the university implemented three wellness days on Feb. 9, March 11 and April 7 in lieu of spring break.

While wellness days are meant to provide a day of relaxation, many Penn State students have differing opinions on their effectiveness.

Son Nguyen said the university should have kept spring break.

“It’s not like the spring break is stopping anything,” Nguyen (junior-computer science) said. “If people want to go home, they are still going to go home with everything mostly being virtual.” Nguyen said wellness days aren’t effective for him, because they’re only one day off in the middle of the week as opposed to a week long break.

“Spring break gives you seven days to take it easy and not really do work, but — these wellness days — you are given one day off, and you still have assignments due within the next couple of days,” Nguyen said.

Leah Bodinger said she would have preferred a full week of spring break as well but understands the importance of not traveling.

“I haven’t really had a real [wellness day],” Bodinger (sophomore-food science) said.

Bodinger said she has a chemistry lab during the next wellness day on March 11 and had to work on the previous one on Feb. 9.



Josie Chen/Collégian file photo

Wellness days are meant to support mental health, though many students have found themselves using it for work instead.

Ethan Smith and Katherine Balay said they thought the wellness days were just another day to catch up on schoolwork instead of a day to focus on mental health.

Smith (sophomore-political science and Italian) said he is normally doing schoolwork since the wellness days are during the middle of the week and in place of class time.

“I think they are a Band-Aid on bigger wounds,” Smith said. “Only one off day [a month] for losing five to seven off days is a big deal and leaves a lot to be desired, especially for students’ mental health and homework.”

Balay (freshman-division of undergraduate studies) said her professors post asynchronous lectures for her to watch, and she’ll end up doing homework most of the day.

“I’m not sure that us going back a week later was the best option [for mental health]. I’m sure a spring break would have been better,” Balay said.

Sophie Rodriguez said she understands why the university canceled spring break, but she thinks

wellness days are not effective by themselves.

“Because of the way distance learning is set up... it is not the most effective way to give people the break they need,” Rodriguez (senior-biomedical engineering) said.

Kaylee Wilson said she wishes there were more wellness days implemented into the spring semester.

“I think it can be helpful if you use it the right way and try to detach from school and relax,” Wilson (senior-psychology) said. “But I think giving more in a row instead of random days throughout the week would have been more of a break.”

For Danielle Lane, the wellness day was nice for sitting in bed all day.

“Just [taking] the day... to lay and sit in bed is effective for anyone,” Lane (freshman-political science) said, “especially when we are used to waking up early for classes anyway.”

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# Yoga’s positive impact on mental health

By Violet Zung  
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, some Penn State students are turning to yoga to help alleviate stress, anxiety and depression.

Erin Raupers, the assistant director of Penn State Health Promotion and Wellness department, said yoga and mental health have a correlation.

“It is important to know that there is not necessarily a causation, which [would mean] that action A, which would be yoga, causes outcome B, which is to improve mental health,” Raupers said. “There is no guarantee that yoga will change mental health, but there are a lot of studies out there that show a positive impact.”

Student Nina Nudell, who uses yoga as a coping mechanism, said yoga has completely changed her life — but she wasn’t always willing to try it.

“My mom does yoga, and she has done it her entire life,” Nudell (senior-biological engineering) said. “She always wanted me to do it and ground myself, and I never listened.”

Nudell said she “fell in love with it” after she started a daily yoga routine. She said she now makes sure she doesn’t miss a day.

Dream Vo, president of the Yoga Club at Penn State, said yoga is also a good way to release yourself and to get into meditation.

“I think there is a really good sense of freedom when it comes to mental health, and I would say a lot of people use yoga as a really good outlook — something they could use to release themselves,” Vo (senior-aerospace engineering) said.

For Vo, the most important part of the yoga experience is the activity’s ability to help participants focus on mindfulness. When practicing yoga, the body releases serotonin, which not only helps the body feel good, but also helps the individual focus and relax, according to Vo.

Raupers referenced several other physical benefits of yoga, including a reduction of anxiety and stress, the modulation of stress response systems in the body — systems that can make those who do yoga more alert — and decreases in heart rate, blood pressure and breathing rates.

She also said yoga can increase heart rate variability, or the speed at which heart rate can adapt to new environments, which she said can help reduce stress.

“There are way more positives than negatives [to practicing yoga],” Raupers said, “but it is important to keep in mind that everyone is different.”

As an avid yogi, Victor Oliveira said he also researched the benefits of practicing yoga.

“I have read and looked up scientific research experiments where they found that [the] practice of yoga can actually improve some structures of the brain and the mind,” Oliveira (junior-marketing) said, “and apparently, that is because yoga combines physical exercise with breathing and mindfulness.”

Nudell said a common

contributing factor in many individuals’ struggles with anxiety and depression is a tendency to focus on the past and the future instead of the present.

“We think and we are in our minds all day long, and that is where anxiety and sadness comes from,” Nudell said. “Yoga is basically a moving meditation. You are connecting your breath and your body, and it is a way to pause for a second and be present in that moment.”

Nudell said she thinks yoga makes focusing on mindfulness easier than meditation because “you can focus on your movements as well.”

“It is definitely an outlet for me personally and [for] a lot of people,” Nudell said. Moreover, Oliveira said yoga can help people focus on the present.

“We only really have now — the here and the now and the present — and yoga is a practice and a journey that enables us to become more skilled at centering [ourselves],” Oliveira said.

Vo also said yoga is easily accessible.

“Honestly, I practice yoga with or without a mat, and you can do it in any environment,” Vo said. “It is a very beautiful practice.”

For some like Vo, yoga is also a way to avoid the negative impact of the coronavirus on mental health.

“I feel like I am in a coffin at times inside my apartment, but yoga is an outlet — it is a vehicle that helps you escape,” Vo said. “I would say it is the best practice to maintain your body.”

Generally, Raupers said yoga is a practice that can help with overall well-being.

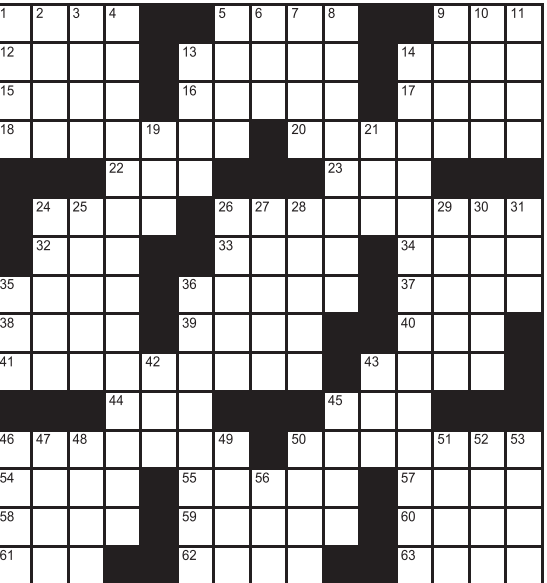
“For people who are dealing with depression, anxiety and stress, yoga is appealing,” Raupers said. “It is an appealing way to better manage those symptoms, and evidence is growing that yoga is low risk and [that] there is a high yield approach in improving overall health.”

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# Puzzles

## Across

- Goat hair garments
- Cot
- Corker
- Cowboy exhibition
- Bundle
- Jack of *Rio Lobo*
- Healing plants
- Pac 10 team
- Weather consideration for travel
- Put away for a rainy day
- Golfer Ernie
- Shade tree
- Poet Teasdale
- Something to avoid while on the road
- 1004, Roman
- Mitch Miller’s instrument
- Wine valley
- Tableland
- Beef on the hoof
- Garbage barge
- Toiletry item
- Minus
- Poi source



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- Plunge
- Prayer’s end
- Toils
- Soon, to a bard
- Biddy
- Brings home
- Longings
- Hotel manager
- Ger. composer
- Model
- Macpherson
- At peace
- Vermine
- Working while off work
- \_\_\_ mode
- HS math class (Abbr.)
- Blot
- Grocery section
- Carried
- Weighty
- Fertile soil
- Implied
- Adage
- Subway inits.
- Travel cautiously by auto
- Hoodwink
- Elevator part
- Lincoln or Ford, e.g. (Abbr.)
- Bryce Canyon locale
- Appellation
- Small songbird
- Loafer, e.g.
- Clumsy boats
- Kudzu, for one
- Bard’s river
- Camera part

## Down

- A Baldwin
- Cattle member
- Jai
- Good time for a long trip
- Film part
- Brouhaha

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WORD SEARCH

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Fish Fry

Barracuda  
Bass  
Bonito  
Calamari  
Carp  
Catfish  
Caviar  
Clam  
Cod  
Crab  
Eel  
Flounder  
Haddock  
Lobster  
Mackerel  
Mahimahi  
Marlin  
Mussel  
Octopus  
Oyster  
Perch  
Prawn  
Salmon  
Scallop  
Shark  
Shrimp  
Snapper  
Sole  
Trout  
Tuna

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G A L K L O C T O P U S K L I N Q  
F M N Q L I I R A M A L A C U A O  
A P J E O Z N S R H S I F T A C R

Kakuro (Cross Sums)

The rules are easy to learn: A number above the diagonal line in a black square is the sum of the white squares to the right of it. A number below the diagonal line is the sum of the white squares in the sequence below it. You may only use the digits 1 to 9, and a digit may be used only once in any sequence.

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# We need more wellness days

Tuesday marked the first (of three in total) wellness days of the semester, sanctioned by Penn State so as to provide a “pause in teaching and learning and to focus on wellness, self-care and the health of our community.”

The day felt well-earned, but the implementation still needs improvement if the university is sincerely interested in achieving these goals.

Penn State originally announced the slate of days to soften the impact of having a spring semester with no spring break. Wisely discerning that students and faculty need respite from their studies — especially at the height of the pandemic — and recognizing also that a traditional spring break might make this same pandemic worse, the university roped off three separate days of the required rest.

All this is noble enough, and the university should receive credit for having enough foresight in this area. However, limited dates and disturbing reports of students

## OUR VIEW

### Are three days nearly enough time off in the best of situations?

having assignments due on these so-called wellness days should cause reflection and rethinking on the university’s part.

Are three days nearly enough time off in the best of situations? How about in an aforementioned plague? Can true relaxation and rest be found while Canvas’s menu still demands homework due at midnight?

In terms of simple arithmetic, the university’s plan to compensate students for the loss of spring break does not add up. Spring break normally lasts for an entire week, from Monday to Friday (plus the obligatory Saturday and Sunday). The addition of the weekend should not be discounted, since the consecutive effect of the break makes it that much more effective.

Compare this duration to the meager offering of mental wellness days, where only a single day in each full month breaks up the otherwise-endless grind of collegiate life.

Three days, instead of five. If one prefers to think consecutively, it’s three days contrasted with seven.

Of course, the university’s decision to put each wellness day in the middle of the week, rather than its beginning or end, makes sense as a way to decrease the likelihood of students returning home or sojourning to distant parts. When this possibility of travel is decreased, the possibility of students contracting and spreading the coronavirus decreases just as much.

Similarly, the reasoning behind spacing each wellness day so far apart cannot be

faulted. Consecutive days further increase the risk of students traveling and exposing both themselves and others to the virus.

Fault can be found, however, with the shortage of days offered and the far too vast space between them. Week after week of classes, with only one day per month to break the tide of labs and essays, does not bode well for the mental health of our community. In fact, the current arrangement seems destined to crank up the intensity of our collective un-wellness several notches.

Not only should Penn State add more wellness days to the calendar, at least to make up for the lack of spring break, but the university should also experiment further with wellness days even

once the formal pandemic ends.

Rather than treating wellness days as a relic of the coronavirus era, the university should instead make them a fixture of every academic year moving forward.

A 2000 study found that stressed college students are significantly more likely to live unhealthy lifestyles and exhibit crippled levels of self-esteem.

Since this study was conducted in 2000, one can only imagine how the advent of social media and blue light burnout (not to mention pandemics) has multiplied stressors and their overall toxicity.

If the university is sincere in its commitment to the well-being of its community, then it needs to actively pursue policies and programs that prove it.

The inclusion of more wellness days both this semester and beyond could put to rest any suspicions that Penn State does not actually care about having a healthy and restful student body.



Cartoons by Kaleigh Quinnan

MY VIEW | Sarah Pellis

## How reaching out to Penn State’s CAPS has helped me

2020 was a rough year for many reasons, and 2021 has been rough for many of the same reasons.



Pellis

In the past, I have written about my mental health — especially during the coronavirus pandemic — and about how I am taking initiative to finally getting help after realizing I did not want to suffer in silence anymore.

For those who do know me personally, I do not like talking about my own feelings and I can come off “standoffish,” but ultimately friendly when you first meet me. It has gotten to the point where I hold so much in that I feel on the verge of exploding. I still feel this way often.

That is why I decided to finally seek help, and escape this period of helplessness — to get some things off my chest and creep out of the suffering. However, I did not know where to begin.

After asking others for advice and trying to find an easy approach to some sort of

help, I went to Penn State’s Counseling and Psychological Services to see what I could do. I wanted to explore and take advantage of the university’s opportunities while I was able to.

Exploring the website just to find specific help for what I needed was daunting. I have never done anything like this and there was so much information.

I knew I wanted to seek counseling, so I found a number to call to get an “on the phone” screening.

Counseling in my high school almost seemed frowned upon, and counselors were mostly used for academics and not for student’s personal lives.

I was embarrassed to be seen anywhere near the counselor’s office because I came off as “the happy kid” and not one to be asking for help.

In contrast, Penn State’s services are actually very helpful and not intimidating at all, which surprised me.

Maybe it is the fact that I have been in college for awhile now or that I have a new found confidence in myself compared to high school, but CAPS

“I am done with the stigma of mental health. It is a sad excuse to escape reality and I was one of those people who sought such escape.”

Sarah Pellis

seemed different (in a good way).

The phone screening was actually really helpful. Since it was over the phone, I did not have the pressure of talking to someone in person or on a Zoom call. It is way more nerve-racking to actually see a person when you are just trying to get help.

I was asked basic questions and why I was reaching out. For the first time, I opened up right away to the person on the phone about my struggles and why I was there.

Right after, I was told I had another appointment later that week for someone to schedule and send me a list of therapists. It was like I finally was taking a big step in the right

direction and a weight was off my chest.

I have not scheduled an appointment with anyone yet, but I am excited to do so.

Overall, I have had a good experience with CAPS and I would recommend students check it out as well. It is important that you get the help you deserve, and this is a quick and easy option to do so.

I am done with the stigma of mental health. It is a sad excuse to escape reality and I was one of those people who sought such escape.

Do not be afraid to go past your boundaries if it helps you in the long run. I always thought that keeping things to myself and not expressing my problems was how I was going to live my life. That is not, however, how we were meant to live.

Now, I am glad I reached out and I am excited to see where this simple phone call takes me.

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# Research shows less students seeking help

**By Olivia Estright**  
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

The coronavirus has taken a significant toll on many people’s mental health over the past year — specifically college-aged students — though universities are seeing less students seeking psychological services.

Penn State’s Center for Collegiate Mental Health released a five-part blog series spanning from February to March comparing the mental health of college students across the country before and during the pandemic.

One study found that with almost 50,000 students seeking services during the pandemic, only 33% of the students said their reason was related to the coronavirus.

In addition, CCMH found that there were 32% less students seeking treatment in fall 2020 compared to fall 2019.

Senior Director of Penn State Counseling & Psychological Services Ben Locke said the decline was caused by a variety of situations, but less students being on campus was most likely the greatest factor.

“The biggest reason for the decline is that people tend to seek help where they live,” Locke said. “Residential living is down by about 30% at the university. The biggest driver is really that fewer people are living on campus.”

Although CCMH doesn’t

provide data specific to Penn State, Locke said the university is still “in line with national averages,” and Penn State CAPS did notice a drop-off in students requesting services.

For students who said their mental health was negatively impacted by the coronavirus, CCMH found higher levels of mental health distress in the form of depression, generalized anxiety, social anxiety, eating concerns, hostility, alcohol use and general distress.

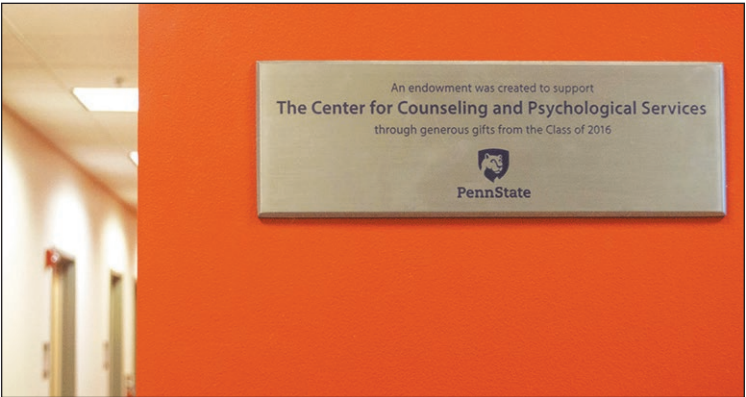
Although psychology professor Sarah Myruski was teaching remotely at Hunter College in New York at the start of the pandemic, she said she still noticed a general “increase in anxiety, stress and worries about the uncertainties of the future.”

“When the pandemic initially started, there was a panic,” Myruski said. “My students were so stressed and didn’t know what to expect with the online format.”

Since she started teaching at Penn State in the fall, Myruski said she noticed these feelings “leveling off.”

“All of these challenges are new to everybody,” Myruski said. “A lot of people are still adjusting to online learning.”

The blog from CCMH also found the self-reported distress of students was almost the same in fall 2019 compared to fall 2020. The greatest differences were increases in eating concerns and



Courtney Taylor/Collegian file photo

**Penn State’s CCMH** released a blog series comparing the mental health of college students before and during the pandemic.

family distress.

In the studies, first-year students said they felt the highest levels of negative impact on mental health from the coronavirus, loneliness or isolation, and missed experiences or opportunities. Seniors were rated the highest in areas of career and financial distress.

In terms of differentiation between races, CCMH found that Black students reported lower rates of negative impacts in mental health, isolation, motivation and academics compared to all other races and ethnicities. Students who identify as American Indian and Alaskan Native reported the highest levels of negative impact in finances, personal health concerns, grief/loss and food/housing insecurity.

Sexuality also played a role in determining some student’s negative mental health impacts. Students who identified as bisexual, questioning, pansexual, lesbian and queer reported high rates of negative impacts on mental health, motivation or focus, isolation, academics and missed opportunities.

Although there was an overall decrease in students seeking treatment, CCMH found that the average number of all attended appointments per client increased by approximately 20% after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

“It reflects the idea of how caseloads of counselors impact the amount of services they are able to provide,” Locke said.

With the pandemic creating

advancements in technology, telehealth services are now being used to avoid face-to-face interactions.

“In telehealth, it’s with a real person just over video chat,” Myruski said. “I would say for some people that can still be a barrier, because they would still be talking to a stranger and that could be intimidating. For some, a nonhuman source of information might be at least a good entry point.”

Penn State offers services through You@PSU, a telehealth service to help students evaluate their current mental health CAPS Chat — virtual consultations with counselors — is available for free.

For students seeking support who have access to student health insurance plans, Healthiest You is a telehealth option that allows 24/7 access to a doctor, medical opinions and the ability to search for an online healthcare worker.

“If people are looking for individual counseling, therapy or psychotherapy, most places are not doing in-person services right now,” Locke said. “Whether a student were to seek services with us or through a different platform, I think those are great ideas for the pandemic.”

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# School of Theatre students experience inequality

**By Ava Leone**  
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

On a typical school day, Jillian Aebli packs dancing, acting, singing, accent and dialect training into seven and a half hours of back-to-back classes — it’s rare that she ever gets a break.

“A packed day last year was kind of fun, being in person... but since being on Zoom has been a thing, it’s much more exhausting,” Aebli (sophomore-acting) said.

Once her classes finish, she is off to rehearsal from 6:30-10:30 p.m. until her day is finally over — after over 12 hours of staring at a glowing blue laptop screen, she at last gets to look away.

Combined with the emotionally grueling nature of performing and the isolation the coronavirus brought to the table this past year, mental health has been

a struggle for some students in the School of Theatre and exacerbated the inequalities within.

According to Jalen Martin, even though people in the School of Theatre may talk about self care a lot, there just isn’t enough time in their schedules to actually implement it into their lives.

“When we do have [free] time to do self-care, what ends up happening is we have to do homework or something — there’s just always something to do,” Martin (senior-acting) said. “If you don’t invest all your time into your major, people look down on you. It’s a little toxic and unfortunate, but that’s the culture and environment. I think that’s how it is with a lot of performing arts programs around the nation.”

Martin said many people dropped from his class by their sophomore year due to the in-

tense physical, emotional, mental and time commitments the acting major calls for. Even though Martin remains passionate about acting, his experience in the School of Theatre has taught him the importance of advocating for himself when he begins to feel overwhelmed.

Aebli said taking her classes entirely on Zoom this year has made her feel far less motivated and separated from the artistic community, which would normally help her overcome her strenuous schedule.

“Even though I get to see my classmates every day on Zoom — and that’s such a great part of my day, seeing their faces — but not being with them in person is very difficult. Everyone knows that a FaceTime call is not the same as having lunch with someone,” Aebli said. “So it’s that huge in-person element that has been taken away that has kind of changed how we look at our class and how we almost took it for granted last year.”

The School of Theatre added graduate student Antoinette Cambria to its faculty as a mental health liaison in August 2020. It’s uncertain whether her position will be permanent just yet.

Although Cambria (graduate-counselor education and supervision) has had “great experiences” with students seeking help during her one-on-one office hours, she said the coronavirus created barriers to her accessibility.

“I was hoping to have an office in the theatre building where students, staff and faculty could have easy and consistent access to my support and services,” Cambria

said via email. “Unfortunately, COVID-19 and its impacts have prevented me from doing so in the way I envisioned.”

Aebli said she receives Cambria’s weekly “wellness newsletters” over email — which include supportive psychoeducation resources — but since Cambria’s position started virtually during the pandemic, Aebli said she still does not know a lot about the details of Cambria’s job.

While Cambria is a resource available to all students in the School of Theatre, the musical theatre majors specifically have access to a Musical Theatre Wellness Center within the college.

In October 2019, the School of Theatre launched the new initiative to create the Musical Theatre Wellness Center to support its students — but musical theatre students only.

Even though the Wellness Center is not a physical building yet, musical theatre majors have access to psychologists, nutritionists, laryngologists and doctors for free or at reduced rates. Head of musical theatre John Simpkins oversees the center and its employees.

Darron Hayes Jr. said the initiative started because getting into CAPS can be difficult for students, especially if they have demanding schedules like

performing arts majors do.

According to Hayes (senior-musical theatre), the Wellness Center has been beneficial for him during his time with the School of Theatre.

“It’s been absolutely incredible. I love that I have basically so many things at my fingertips. If my back is hurting from dance class or from a show that I’m in, I know where to go, and I know who can help me,” Hayes said. “I know that they know about the musical theatre lifestyle... If I need help [with] meal planning or I need to get more greens in my diet, I know who I can talk to. And if my mental health is struggling, I know exactly where I can go so it’s great — it’s wonderful.”

According to Jimin Moon, most of his friends in his major use the therapists provided to them through the Wellness Center. The mental health resources available to musical theatre students are “above and beyond” what he imagines a typical Penn State student has access to.

Despite how lucky Moon (sophomore-musical theatre) said he feels to have the Wellness Center, he does not know how he would feel about the School of Theatre’s resources if he was not in the musical theatre program.

*Visit [collegian.psu.edu](https://collegian.psu.edu) for the rest of the story.*

**“If you don’t invest all your time into your major, people look down on you. It’s a little toxic and unfortunate, but that’s the culture and environment.”**

**Jalen Martin**

senior-acting



Jonah Rosen/Collegian file photo

**Penn State’s School of Theatre** hired a new mental health liason.

MY VIEW | MEGAN SWIFT

# Online romanticization of mental health must end

We live in an almost fully digitized world in 2021, especially considering the implications of the coronavirus pandemic. The newfound accessibility and anonymity of social media has enabled many college-aged students to communicate and seek responses for the state of their personal mental health.

However, with a global push toward the online romanticization of anxiety, depression, eating disorders and suicide, it has been hard to discern whether adolescents are sharing a mere cry for attention from their peers or a serious call for help.

The phrases “I feel depressed,” “I feel anxious” and “I’m gonna kill myself (kms)” have become sick rites of teenage passage — trendy badges of honor to display with pride. When I reflect on my personal battles with anxiety, panic attacks and my subsequent search for help, the experiences were not glamorous.

A surface-level example of this is Jeremy Zucker’s song “all the kids are depressed.” Even though the tune came out in 2018, it still holds a spot in his Top 5 on Spotify, indicating that

Zucker’s quickly growing fanbase covets the deeper meaning.

“How long have you been smiling?” Zucker wrote in the opening line of the song. “It seems like it’s been too long.”

Though it can be presumed Zucker admirably uses music as an outlet to siphon off plaguing thoughts, after close analysis of these and other lyrics, it’s clear he perpetuates the dehumanization of the word “depression.” As a prominent figure in pop culture, this influences young people to believe depression is normal.

It’s OK to struggle with your mental health, but illnesses lack normalcy when they are a matter of more grave concern. According to Mayo Clinic, “experiencing anxiety is a normal part of life,” but when symptoms begin to interfere with daily activities is when one should consider seeking treatment.

At this time, it’s important to pause and acknowledge one fact — I firmly believe everyone’s mental health struggles matter, whether they are big or small. It is also important to concede

that discussing them online may be the only outlet for some, which is perfectly fine.

But it becomes an issue when words like “depression” and “anxiety,” or even “suicide” are thrown around in casual conversation as commonplaces with no weight.

These terms need to be spoken more reverently and used less often. What could mean the difference between life and death for some shouldn’t be reduced to a joke by others trying to fit in.

By dramatizing somewhat average experiences, those who are actually having similar thoughts are less inclined to seek treatment because the words carry less influence. They’re left feeling invalidated, unwarranted and ashamed.

Another example of the escalated unimportance of trigger words can be found on the ever popular app TikTok.

Throughout quarantine in summer 2020, one of the main TikTok trends was hiding in your room or “depression cave” all day. Users made videos to the song “Flight of the Bumblebee” by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, donning large blankets as capes while running to retrieve food.

Users were able to come together and have a laugh at the

shared experience of turning bedrooms into “depression caves,” but in the process, depression was normalized as a common experience.

What happens when mental illnesses become more than just a joke?

According to the North Carolina Medical Journal, exposure to suicide and self-injury content online can increase the likelihood of an inclination toward those thoughts.

“In a recent study of over 400 youth who were psychiatrically hospitalized due to risk of harm to self or others, a small but meaningful proportion of youth reported viewing online content that promoted suicide (14.8%) or self-injury (16.6%) during the two weeks prior to their admission,” NCMJ said in an article titled “The Impact of Social Media on Youth Mental Health.”

It’s hard to articulate the truthfulness of posts and comments made about mental health online and in person. Which are posted only to draw sympathy or clout? This blurry line further exacerbates the already-present stigma surrounding those seeking needed treatment.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, the already great need

for mental health treatment in the United States skyrocketed.

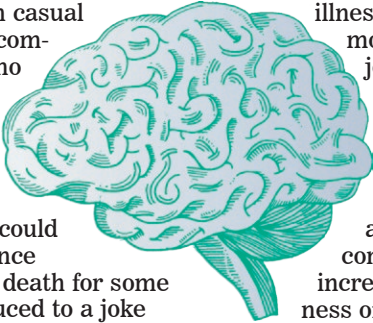
In an American Psychological Association poll published in November 2020, most of the 1,800 psychologists surveyed reported a 74% increase in patients seeking treatment for anxiety disorders and a 60% increase in patients seeking treatment for depressive disorders compared to before the start of the pandemic.

“Mental health matters” is a phrase I see reposted almost daily on social media platforms — but does it really?

The increased online romanticization of mental illnesses prior to and throughout the coronavirus pandemic undermines the honest struggles and credibility of those trying to understand their own minds.

Former stigmas of having a mental illness and seeking help have transitioned to a stigma around outwardly expressing happiness and success. There is now a feeling of guilt surrounding people who aren’t able to show any evidence of hardship.

I should not have to become a martyr on social media for my personal struggles to gain validity, and I should not only be able to fit in by conceding that I’ve felt anxious or sad. We need to encourage those who are struggling with mental illness and stop stealing the merit of words that carry so much meaning.



**“By dramatizing somewhat average experiences, those who are actually having similar thoughts are less inclined to seek treatment because the words carry less influence.”**



# Men's hockey keeps positive mindset

By Zech Lambert  
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

In Canada, professional and collegiate hockey players alike are quick to open up about mental health for at least one day every year.

Among other sports, hockey has been at the forefront of mental health awareness due to Canada's Bell Let's Talk Day.

The day, which was recognized on Jan. 28 this year, raises awareness and combats stigmas surrounding mental health.

For every interaction on social media — whether it be a view of a video the company puts out, a tweet with #BellLetsTalk or a retweet of a tweet containing that hashtag, among other things — five cents is donated to Canadian mental health initiatives. This year, nearly \$8 million dollars have been raised for the cause.

Many Penn State players participated in the movement, including Americans Paul DeNaples and Christian Sarlo.

But little did they know their own mental health would soon be put to the test, when the Nittany Lions were shut down because of

a positive coronavirus test within the program in early February.

It would be nearly a month until the Nittany Lions reemerged from their hiatus to once again take the ice and return to some semblance of current-day normalcy.

However, a month of being isolated from the outside world made Penn State more conscious than ever of the team's mental well-being.

Players leaned on and rallied around their teammates, coaches checked in and the team tried to find some kind of positive light in an otherwise dark, bleak time for the squad.

The importance of camaraderie shone through during the blue and white's layoff, as Guy Gadowsky said teammates turned to one another when they needed their help most.

"I think they were very supportive of each other," Gadowsky said. "It wasn't one guy going through anything alone. They had plenty of emotional support."

Some of that emotional support came from Gadowsky himself. He checked in on his team multiple times throughout the break to



James Leavy/Collegian file photo

**Team captain and forward Alex Limoges (senior-supply chain management) controls the puck during a game against Wisconsin at the Pegula Ice Arena.**

make sure they were doing their best to stay positive during a difficult time.

Even with resources like teammates to receive help from, sometimes an unexpected shred of positivity can go a long way. Despite all the chaos that was swirling around the team, there was a beam of light and energy cast onto the Nittany Lions during their shutdown.

Senior Adam Pilewicz was able to participate in the entirety of THON this year, something the school's men's and women's hockey players don't typically get a chance to do since the 46-hour dance marathon occurs midseason.

A senior like Pilewicz, Penn State captain and forward Alex Limoges could hardly contain his admiration for his teammate.

"[THON] has been something hockey players have wanted to be a part of for a while," Limoges said. "It inspired me, it motivated me to be better. I know everybody in the locker room is so proud of him."

Some of the team was even able

to gather with Pilewicz in person to support him as he danced to battle childhood cancer.

Gadowsky raved about how great an event THON is, but also how it helped his team push through the admittedly difficult time it was going through.

"It's so special," Gadowsky said. "I think it's a great thing at any time, especially during the pause we had."

Aside from the obvious toll a month of isolation can take, the daily grind of a hockey season is not easy for any player both physically or mentally.

To gain an edge, the players believe cerebral fortitude is of the utmost importance. Mental sharpness is one of the biggest tools in the game, and junior netminder Oskar Autio puts a priority on how he approaches the game between his ears.

"I talk a lot with our sports psychologist," Autio said. "The stuff I focus on are relaxation and mental preparation before the game."

Autio said he is fortunate to have people in his corner he can

lean on when he needs to.

He credited a lot of the goalie coaches he's been able to work with throughout his career, including those from his home of Espoo, Finland, and Chicago, where he played juniors for the Chicago Steel.

"I definitely feel like I have a lot of people that support me, and it's definitely helped me a lot," Autio said.

Now with the break over, the Nittany Lions can once again focus more of their attention to hockey and, in particular, the upcoming Big Ten Tournament.

The prospect of getting back onto the ice is a shot of positivity into the arms of Nittany Lions who surely could use one after being cooped up for such a long period of time.

"Mentally, it's long overdue," Limoges said. "Everybody just wants to play, and so there was a lot of excitement getting back last weekend and still a lot of excitement right now."

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Ken Minamoto/Collegian

**Oskar Autio (junior-psychology) makes a glove save during a men's hockey game against Notre Dame.**

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