

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH POLICY



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Policy Written by: Kara T. Lord

The University of Guyana Psychology Task Force

Policy Adapted from: The Student Mental Health Policies of - The University of Manchester, The University of Oxford, and Heriot Watt University.



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1.0 Introduction

The University of Guyana (herein referred to as the “University”) recognizes the need to directly address matters related to mental health. While Guyana still seeks to develop policies and legislation related to mental health; the University has opted to take a position where we demonstrate a conscious effort to be responsible for supporting the mental health of our students.

Matters related to mental health and wellness may arise from a number of avenues, including biological or a combination of experiences. This may be related to, for example, development, trauma, and genetics. The University must continue to move towards a place of understanding and recognition of the importance of mental health and wellbeing. It is important to be able to recognize where there may be a problem related to mental health. There are a number of signs and symptoms which may indicate that a student is dealing with difficulties in his/her mental health. While these signs vary from person to person and the display of certain symptoms will be more specific depending on the type of mental illness; there are a few general signs which can include:

- changes in behaviour, such as becoming more withdrawn, aggressive, or volatile;
- physical signs such as cuts to wrists or a lack of energy;
- changes in patterns of attendance; and
- changes in academic performance (Johnston, 2018, p. 8).



2.0 Definitions

“***Mental health*** encompasses the emotional resilience that enables us to enjoy life and to survive pain, disappointment and sadness, and an underlying belief in our own, and others’ dignity and worth. It also allows us to engage productively in and contribute to society or our community” good (Johnston, 2018, p. 11).

“A positive sense of ***mental wellbeing*** is for all of us to consider all of the time, as we might consider our physical, social, and spiritual wellbeing. It is quite possible to have a good sense of mental wellbeing and yet be living with a diagnosed mental illness. Mental health difficulties, often following major life events such as the end of a relationship, close bereavement or leaving home, can impact significantly on how students feel about themselves and how they engage with the transitions of student life. Symptoms may beset anyone at any time, giving rise to ongoing conditions that could interfere with the student’s university experience and have implications for academic study” (Johnston, 2018, p. 11).

“***Mental illness*** – arising from organic, genetic, psychological or behavioural factors (or combinations of these) that occur in an individual and are not understood or expected as part of normal development or culture – can be acute or chronic...” (Johnston, 2018, p. 11).

Source: (Johnston, 2018) Heriot-Watt University Mental Health Policy Document



3.0 Purpose

This policy seeks to ensure that provisions are made which consider the wellbeing of students – particularly as it relates to their mental wellness. Whether the problems associated with mental health are derived from a pre-existing condition, developing, or chronic condition.

4.0 Scope

This policy covers all registered students with approval from the Assistant Registrar – Admissions. Students may be registered in any programme of study at any University of Guyana Campus including those which fall under the Institute for Distance and Continuing Education (IDCE).

This policy articulates the University’s position on how it intends to address and respond to matters related to mental health while advising on the support services and care available to students.

5.0 Aim

The student mental health policy aims to articulate the University’s responsiveness to matters related to the mental health needs of all students while advising on the support services and care available to students. In addition, the policy also aims to ensure that students are aware of the policies and services which can be of support to them during their period of study with the University.



6.0 Objectives

This policy broadly seeks to:

- promote mental health and wellbeing throughout the student population and across campuses;
- raise the awareness of mental health and wellness across the University while reducing the stigma attached to mental illness;
- coordinate efforts to ensure that there is a standard, consistent, and harmonious system for addressing mental illness and problems among the student population;
- ensure that students are aware of the support services available to them during their time at the university; and
- ensure that support services are made available to students as needed.

7.0 Responsibilities

- i. The Office of the Registrar holds the responsibility for the implementation of this policy.
- ii. The Office of the Registrar Student Support Services Unit provides several student support services that cater to the needs of the student population.
- iii. The Deputy Registrar may be appointed by the Registrar to intervene as needed on matters which he is unable to address in a timely manner.
- iv. The Wellness Committee will guide the Registrar/Deputy Registrar as needed.



8.0 Student Welfare

The Office of the Assistant Registrar – Student Welfare is responsible for ensuring the emotional wellness of all students and will be proactive in advancing knowledge and responsiveness in providing support when necessary. In that regard the key responsibilities shall include:

- i. Providing public Education and Awareness to the community [UG] on mental health and responding appropriately. In particular, the unit will craft and keep updated the guidelines on what to do in a crisis when dealing with students with a history of mental health issues and referring students for assessment and care where necessary;
- ii. Protecting against discriminatory practices or policies, harassment or bullying of students with mental health difficulties;
- iii. Facilitating warning and crisis intervention in critical cases. Critical cases being defined as physical threat or harm posed to student or others in the community;
- iv. Referring and/or collaborating with agencies and other mental health professionals on any of the items above, i - iii;
- v. Serving on or advising the appropriate board on a student's fitness to study on assessment after crisis intervention;
- vi. Contributing to the periodic review and update of the University's mental health policy as well as related policies.



9.0 Student Support Services

The University offers the following services to students in support of their mental health and wellbeing:

- Student advisement (academic)
- Mental health consultations
- Counseling
- Student groups
- Medical services

10.0 Declaration

Students may at any point in their studies declare/indicate where they may be struggling as a result of mental health concerns. Matters of this nature may be taken to the Registrar by anyone.

11.0 Confidentiality

We understand that there may be some reluctance from students to share personal information relating to their mental health or wellbeing and that such information will not affect their academic standing with the University. Therefore the University should seek to be considerate in balancing the use of sensitive and confidential information against the general principle of operational transparency to aid decision-making.

All staff members of the University are bound by ethical and moral codes to ensure that the nature of discussions held with students whether for consultation or treatment purposes must be held in the strictest confidence.



12.0 Use of Information

The University will seek to continuously update its knowledge and awareness about the key mental health issues affecting our student population. However, documented information will never be used on an individual basis. Instead, a general pool of data with no specific reference may be analyzed to address how the University may continue to improve our support services offered.

- i. Admission Requirements - Mental Illness All applicants/candidates who may require mental health support are encouraged during the student application process to declare those needs.
- ii. Where the applicant has a diagnosed mental illness, this should be stated during the Registry application process. The University has a long-standing dedication to equal opportunity and therefore will not discriminate on the basis of a student's mental illness. This will not affect the admission criteria for any student. Candidates will not be judged for admittance to a programme (except where a programme requirement is based on fitness as expressly stated) on the basis of reporting matters related to their current state of mental health.
- iii. Consultations/interviews may be held, with the applicant and/or professional counseling as needed to ensure that the scope of the study is not one that will cause excessive stress/harm to the applicant.
- iv. Next of kin information must be added to the database for each applicant.



13.0 Suspension of Studies

While the University will make every effort to support students with mental illness, there may be cases where a student will not be able to continue their programme of study without interruption due to their mental health needs. These cases exist where the student:

- displaying behavior that is injurious to themselves and others;
 - unable to cope with the demands of attending classes;
 - unable to meet deadline for submission of coursework assessments;
 - unable to attend scheduled classes;
 - demonstrate an inability to function in class or meet the course requirements on examinable pieces or work (e.g. in class test, final examination).
- i. Where it can be confirmed by a practicing professional that these cases occur as a result of the students' mental health; there should be provision for the student to request or be asked to take a leave of absence until such time that the student is deemed fit to resume classes.
 - ii. The resumption of classes in some cases may necessitate that a certificate of fitness is provided by a mental health professional. The Assistant Registrar Student Welfare can determine the cases where this is necessary with the help of the University Counsellor.
 - iii. The student may request a leave of absence through the Student Record Management System (SRMS) and seek approval for the same through their programme department head, and registry. It is expected that this will be a last resort option after having exhausted all avenues for student support, help, and advice.



- iv. The Faculty through the Dean or Assistant Dean may request a leave of absence for a student who is believed to be unfit to continue studies at the current time. However, this request for leave of absence must only be done where the Faculty can provide documentation/evidence to support such a request. Consultation should also be done through the Counseling Support Service offered.
- v. In cases, if a student is unable, the next of kin should be able to do it.

14.0 Conduct and Discipline

All registered students are subject to the University's policy on the Code of Conduct and Discipline. Where there may be a breach in conduct and behavior, matters should be reported in writing to the Registrar/Deputy Registrar and will be reviewed as escalated as needed on a case by case basis.

15.0 Assessment and Examination

Students who have reported a diagnosed case of mental illness (such as anxiety or bipolar disorder) may express their needs for support during periods of examinations. Matters related to extenuating circumstances for the sitting of examinations should be reported to the office of the Assistant Registrar Student Welfare Faculty.

Recommendations can be made on how to best facilitate the examination process based on the needs of the student with a priority to maintain the integrity of the assessment and fairness of the system.



16.0 Further Help & Advice

The University recognizes that the services provided may be limited, particularly where a mental illness that requires regular treatment has been diagnosed. As a result, this section seeks to provide additional guidance which may prove helpful where there is a need for further support.

Contact Details	
University Services Assistant Registrar - Student Welfare E-mail: dking@uog.edu.gy Tel: 624 4123	Students Welfare Division Email: studentswelfare@uog.edu.gy Tel: 222 3595
University Counsellor – Registry E-mail: juanita.cameron@uog.edu.gy Tel: 624 4137	University Registrar E-mail: Registrar@uog.edu.gy
University Medical Centre Email: studentswelfare@uog.edu.gy	Ministry of Social Protection Address: Lamaha St, Georgetown Tel: 225 6545 E-mail:
Ministry of Health – Mental Health Unit Address: 252 Quamina Street, South Cummingsburg Telephone: 2261405/2261407 E-mail: mentalthunit.moph@gmail.com	National Psychiatric Hospital Address: New Amsterdam Telephone 333-2141-4 E-mail: