

Title: Mental Health and the iSchools: Audiences and Strategies for Support

Organizer(s):

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Key Participants: Same as organizers

Abstract: While mental health and self-care are increasingly discussed in the information professions and academe, the high level of need requires an in-depth and strategic response from the iSchool community. Mental health issues occur in multiple communities relevant to the iSchools. Students at undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels are experiencing increasing levels of anxiety and depression (Evans et al., 2018; American Psychological Association (APA), 2015). Work demonstrates that employees of academic institutions (Price & Kerschbaum, 2017) also have significant mental health considerations. Our schools and students are poised to help the communities we engage with and serve to address mental health topics (McElroy, 2018; Pho et al., 2018; Throgmorton, 2017). In this SIE, we will share current details about mental health needs and discourse, focus audience discussion on observations and strategies for addressing these needs within the iSchool community, and develop a collection of resources to be shared online to prompt future engagement in this area.

Description:

Purpose and Intended Audience

Expected outcomes of this SIE include developing a shared understanding of mental health needs, discussing examples of issues in this area from iSchools, and identifying intervention strategies and techniques to support the mental health of iSchool students, employees, and communities. This SIE will interest educators and instructors who teach/supervise students at undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels. In addition, this session will address needs of public communities like library service populations and research participants, so will be relevant to any who engage with their communities or guide others in this work. Finally, we will address mental health in iSchools as workplaces, so faculty, staff, administrators, and student employees are key audiences.

Proposed activities including agenda, ramp-up (development), and follow-through

This SIE is structured around sharing insights and experiences from attendees, and collaboratively developing a set of strategies for identifying and addressing mental health needs relevant to iSchool audiences or stakeholders, including students, employees, and surrounding

communities. We will start with introductions of all attendees to promote rapport and sharing later in the session. In the introduction, we will also begin an anonymous activity that will continue throughout the session, where participants can share written comments and questions without including their identifying information. After a brief presentation that will cover terminology and key research about the various iSchool audiences' mental health needs, the session will focus on discussion, with two breakout sessions that each conclude with sharing of insights with the full group. In the first breakout, we will focus on discussing experiences and observations from attendees. In the second breakout, we will strategize responses, identify resources, and brainstorm mental health priorities for the iSchool community.

The agenda is as follows:

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| 15 Min. | Introduction of Organizers and Attendees |
| 15 Min. | Current Discourses About Mental Health (Presented by Organizers) |
| 15 Min. | Small Group Discussion 1 |
| 10 Min. | Report Out |
| 15 Min. | Small Group Discussion 2 |
| 10 Min. | Report Out |
| 10 Min. | Conclusion |

After the conference, the results of the SIE will be shared through a webpage that reports on our discussion, links to relevant resources, and presents SIE-generated responses to mental health needs among iSchool audiences/stakeholders.

Relevance to the Conference/Significance to the Field

iSchool students, employees, and communities have mental health needs that can be better addressed with awareness and support. College students are seeking more support for mental health needs (APA, 2015). But colleges and universities are struggling to deal with increased demand for services (Reilly, 2018), with the average university having one professional counselor for every 1,737 students (Reese et al., 2015). Recent work finds that “graduate students are more than six times as likely to experience depression and anxiety as compared to the general population,” with transgender, gender-nonconforming students, and women significantly more likely to experience anxiety and depression than cisgender male students (Evans et al., 2018). Other research identifies international student risk, with 44% of international participants in one study identifying an “emotional or stress-related problem that significantly affected their well-being or academic performance within the past year” (Hyun et al., 2007).

Arguing for addressing mental health as a core component of competitive, inclusive hiring practices, a recent guide on supporting faculty argues that tense academic environments

lower campus productivity, and that campus culture that does not acknowledge mental health needs can encourage silence and non-disclosure among employees as well as students (Price & Kerschbaum, 2017).

Our communities also have significant needs that the employees and students of iSchools can address through research, design, and competent services. According to the National Council for Behavioral Health, “each year, more than one in five Americans experiences a mental illness or substance use disorder” (2015). Librarians are addressing these needs with increased conversation about mental health topics (McElroy, 2018; Pho et al., 2018), and through advanced training such as mental health first aid which helps professionals to develop skills for supporting community members showing signs of mental health problem (Throgmorton, 2017). However, there are further opportunities to inform the ways the iSchool community engages with wider audiences.

This SIE will raise awareness of mental health needs of a variety of iSchool stakeholders (students, employees, communities), prompting open discussion about what we have done, what opportunities and challenges we have for addressing these needs, and how we can move forward to do so. The informal discussion format will encourage audience participation, and through sharing of stories and resources after the conference, this SIE will prompt continued engagement with this crucial discussion.

Duration: One 90-minute session

Special Requirements: A room with round tables for small group discussion, microphone (two if possible) for sharing discussion

References:

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- Price, M., & Kerschbaum, S. (2017). *Promoting supportive academic environments for faculty with mental illnesses: Resource guide and suggestions for practice* (pp. 1–29). Philadelphia, PA: Temple Collaborative on Community Inclusion. Retrieved from http://www.tucollaborative.org/sdm_downloads/supportive-academic-environments-for-faculty-with-mental-illnesses/
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