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COLLEGE PLANNING GUIDE FOR STUDENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Written by: [Intelligent.com Higher Education Team](https://www.intelligent.com/higher-education-team) - Updated: Jul 25, 2022



Enrolling in college as a student with a mental health disorder doesn't need to be overwhelming or intimidating. Students who know their rights and learn how to ask for assistance can go on to complete their degree and have a positive educational experience in the process.

To help students find the assistance they need, we created this guide to explain the resources and accommodations most schools provide, and offer tips on how to access these mental health services.

The State of Mental Health on

College Campuses

Over the last decade, organizations like the [Healthy Minds Network](#) have recorded steady increases in depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation within the college student population. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these issues.

A [report](#) issued in June 2020 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that people ages 18 to 24 years old have been affected by mental health issues at a higher rate than adults in older age brackets. As a result, some colleges have struggled to meet this growing demand for student mental health services, which has prompted some demonstrations and backlash on campuses around the country.

But while depression and anxiety seem to have spiked among students, there are other common psychiatric disorders that colleges should be prepared to accommodate.

Common mental health disorders among college students

The American College Health Association National College Health Assessment ([ACHA-NCHA](#)) provides colleges with the largest comprehensive data set on the health of college students. The survey covers a range of topics and is intended to “assist college health service providers, health educators, counselors, and administrators.”

Their latest assessment from spring 2021 provides a relatively recent look into the

overall health and wellness of American college students. The following percentages of respondents reported experiencing problems with these common mental health issues at some point during the previous 12 months:

- **Anxiety.** 28.9%
- **Depression.** 23.4%
- **Eating Disorders.** 5%
- **Bipolar Disorder.** 2.2%
- **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).** 1.4%
- **Substance Abuse.** 1.4%
- **Schizophrenia.** 0.3%

It's worth noting that these numbers were determined by asking survey respondents if they've *ever* been diagnosed with any of these mental health disorders, so it's likely that these percentages are underestimated. Licensed psychologist, Andrea Slaughter points out that substance use among college-aged students is huge – close to 40% – and many students experience overlapping disorders. For example, some students may suffer from anxiety, depression, and substance abuse.

Mental Health Disorder Infographic

How Colleges Accommodate Students With Mental Health Disorders

Colleges can make accommodations for students dealing with a mental health disorder, but it helps to know what you can expect upfront. Students who have received individualized education plans (IEPs) or Section 504 plans during their time in elementary, middle, and/or high school need to know that these plans do not follow them into college. After high school, it becomes the student's responsibility to inform the college of their disability. Colleges are obligated to work with students who have disabilities and are prohibited from discriminating against them.

Most campuses have health and wellness centers for students as well as their own procedures for requesting accommodations or coursework adjustments. During enrollment, students should inform their college of the specific needs they have in order to get the proper assistance. Also, on-campus counseling centers are often free of charge for enrolled students.

Below you can learn more about the common resources colleges have for students with mental health disorders:

Health and wellness centers

Many colleges have their own health and wellness center on campus. These centers typically offer therapy, counseling, support groups, disability advocacy, and mental health education. Students may be able to receive prescriptions and over-the-counter medications there as well. The staff is often composed of psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, nurses, case managers, or peer support providers.

Academic accommodations

How to request accommodations

Advice From an Expert

Dr. Andrea Slaughter – Licensed Psychologist, [LinkedIn](#)

What things should a student with a mental health disorder consider when selecting a college?

Preparation is key, so it's really important for students with a preexisting condition to have a plan for how to manage any potential mental health crises. It also helps minimize the potential

consequences associated with recovery (missed assignments, lost time, poor performance on projects and tests, etc.) Things to consider: Is there a counseling and testing center on the campus? What other wellness services and resources are available through the school?

What would you tell a student with a mental health disorder that believes college is unattainable?

Is it important for students to disclose mental health disorders?

Should students with mental health disorders use campus resources?

What tips would you give a student with a mental health disorder for succeeding in college?

Know Your Rights

A student who is properly informed of their legal rights can tailor their postsecondary schooling for the best experience possible. Colleges must accommodate students with mental health disorders. Whether it's enrollment decisions or academic accommodations, colleges and universities cannot prevent or limit a student's ability to attend class based on their psychiatric disorder. Certain laws help prevent discrimination and protect college students' rights.

According to [Title II](#) of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and [Section 504](#) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, discrimination on the basis of disability is prohibited. Additionally, students' educational records are protected under the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) (FERPA), including disability status and request for accommodations. This federal law protects students regarding the release of records to third parties. Students have the right to access their records, demand disclosure with consent only, amend records, and file complaints against schools for violating FERPA.

Assistive Apps for Students With Mental Health Disorders

In addition to receiving help from their college or university, many students look to assistive apps to cope with their mental health disorder. Assistive apps are an

empowering way for people to improve their daily lives with the help of technology. In the list below, we've highlighted some of the best assistive apps for common mental health disorders.

The following assistive apps are not replacements for professional mental health advice. Please consult a medical provider before making any health-related decisions.

Anxiety apps

Apps		
Calm	Calm focuses on relaxation, meditation, and sleep. Their library includes a number of sleep stories, sleep music, lessons and masterclasses in meditation, as well as soothing nature sounds.	Download: Android iOS
DARE	Created as a companion to the book by the same name, DARE is an evidence-based app that aims to help people overcome panic attacks, worry, insomnia, and anxiety.	Download: Android iOS

Depression apps

Substance abuse apps

Eating disorder apps

Bipolar disorder apps

Autism spectrum disorder apps

Scholarships and Financial Resources for Students With Mental Health Disorders



Many scholarships exist to help students with mental health disorders pay for college. Here are a few to jumpstart your research:

- [**The Quell Foundation Fighter Scholarship**](#). This merit-based scholarship is awarded to high school seniors, undergraduates, or graduate students who are being treated for or have been diagnosed with a mental health condition. The amounts awarded are undisclosed and may vary.
- [**Baer Reintegration Scholarship**](#). The Baer scholarship is for prospective students who have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or schizoaffective disorder. They must currently be receiving treatment and be actively involved in rehabilitative or reintegration efforts, just to name a few

requirements. The goal of this funding is to help those with these disorders acquire educational skills to regain their lives. The amounts awarded are needs-based and can range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars.

- [Prochnow Foundation Scholarship](#). Prochnow Foundation's annual \$1,000 scholarship was created to reward a high-achieving student who has been diagnosed with mental illness. This scholarship can be applied to a four-year college or full-length trade school. Their aim is to reduce the financial burden of high-achievers in their pursuit of education and personal development.
- [JC Runyon Foundation Scholarship](#). This scholarship is for students who have successfully completed an inpatient program within a facility, unit, or wing that is dedicated to behavioral health treatment for a mental health disorder. The student will need to have been accepted into a college, university, trade school, or undergraduate program. JC Runyon Foundation created this funding for overcomers who are ready to live the next chapter of their lives. The amounts awarded are undisclosed.
- [Google Lime Scholarship](#). Google aims to help and inspire students by breaking down the barriers preventing them from entering computing and technology fields. This scholarship is for students who consider themselves to have an invisible or visible disability. Scholarships for students studying in the U.S. are \$10,000 and are awarded based on the candidates' academic background and demonstrated passion for computer science.

Additional Resources

Finally, it's worth noting that the following organizations can also provide assistance to students dealing with mental health disorders:

[**The Jed Foundation.**](#) The Jed Foundation is a non-profit organization protecting emotional health and preventing suicides for teens and young adults within the U.S. Their online resource center is a great place to start taking care of your mental health. You'll find quizzes, tips, and support on their website.

[**National Institute of Mental Health \(NIMH\).**](#) NIMH is a leader within the field of mental disorder research. Their website is full of valuable information on various mental illnesses including what they look like, what risks they may pose, and how to go about treating them.

[**MentalHealth.gov.**](#) This website is run by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. They provide a list of toll-free hotlines for anyone needing immediate help and services in the area of mental health.

[**National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery \(NCMHR\).**](#) Led by mental health consumers and/or survivors, NCMHR is leading the transformation of the field through their vision of self-directed recovery. This website is a place to find support within a community and to improve the state of healthcare for those who are or have been affected by mental health issues.

[**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\).**](#) The

SAMHSA website is a place to find treatment in your area. You can find help for substance abuse, mental health disorders, or a combination of both within the vast library of providers they have compiled. They offer a wealth of educational material on these challenging subjects.

Dr. Andrea Slaughter

Licensed Psychologist

Dr. Andrea Slaughter is a licensed psychologist with a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Kentucky. During her matriculation, Dr. Slaughter attained numerous authorship credits in scholarly journals, clinical textbooks, and conference presentations focused on her area of interest – providing culturally competent therapy services to a diversifying population.



Since gaining licensure with the Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists in 2012, Dr. Slaughter has facilitated emotional wellness education, academic presentations, and seminars in over 35 community and professional settings. She is passionate about treating women with perinatal/postpartum issues, utilizing Cognitive Behavioral

approaches to managing anxiety and mood disorders, and teaching assertiveness and boundary setting skills.

Currently, Dr. Slaughter operates a thriving private practice where she provides ongoing psychotherapy and neuropsychological evaluations for adults and adolescents.
