

Campus Happenings

The HWS Gatekeepers Program Returns to Campus

By Kat Frabotta '15
Herald Contributor

According to a survey on www.suicide.org, one in five college students feel that their depression level is higher than it should be. This statistic is not surprising considering the many changes that college life brings - increased academic rigor, an entirely new environment and a more independent lifestyle.

Perhaps more worrisome is that of the 20 percent of students in marked distress, only 6 percent say that they would seek help for their depression. This low ratio proves dangerous, as depression is the primary cause of college suicide and suicide is the second leading cause of death in college students.

For the past four years, Meghann Wraight-Steinmetz and Michael Siembor, psychologists at Hobart and William Smith's Counseling Center, have held a series of suicide prevention training sessions to help teach students and faculty ways to more effectively reach out to students who appear to be in distress.

Created at Syracuse University, the program has received high levels of recognition for its benefits on college campuses, with the Suicide Prevention Resource Center labeling it one of the Best Practices for Suicide Prevention

nationwide.

In the fall of 2008, Steinmetz and Siembor received a grant from Syracuse University to bring the training sessions to the HWS campus. The co-coordinators adapted the program name from "Campus Connect" to the "HWS Gatekeepers Program," a title Steinmetz believes to better embody HWS with its "many student leaders on campus who are around people a lot who serve as gatekeepers and bring people in."

The anxiety that one may feel about approaching a peer who appears distressed can be overwhelming and often leads one to shy away from reaching out at all. Siembor acknowledges this emotion, and he says that the Gatekeepers training sessions "teach people to honor and face the anxiety

that they may feel, and learn ways to use it."

The tactics taught in each session revolve around the three main goals of the program: "For students

interactive learning," Siembor states. "It does not merely give people information on how to help."

Steinmetz adds that the program has also more greatly opened communication between students and members of the Colleges' Counseling Center. "(The sessions) have greatly impacted consultations with faculty and students, and have made the counseling center more accessible, even for students to just come to ask questions."

Steinmetz is quick to clarify that students who serve as gatekeepers "do not need to be counselors,"

but peers who can reach out to distressed students and refer them to additional help when necessary. Steinmetz maintains learning when to make these referrals helps reduce anxiety for the concerned peer.

The Gatekeepers Program is not only beneficial to those who

are worried about the potentially dangerous distress of a student. "The sessions could help one build skills to help others in a variety of crises. Lots of students benefit even more (from help) at the beginning stages of depression, as this helps to reduce distress more quickly," Steinmetz says. Siembor adds that attending the training sessions "reduces stigma of an issue that is greatly oversensitized and helps to normalize the issue."

The substantial benefits of the Gatekeepers Program are clear through the extensive list of HWS community members who are required to undergo the training - campus safety officers, deans, housekeeping and grounds staff, student RAs, all student affairs members and all members of the Center for Teaching and Learning. Those who experience the program are "highly supportive of it," says Steinmetz.

Training for students will be held at 1:30 pm today. To sign up or to receive more information about the Gatekeepers Program and training, e-mail Sandy Gerlach, receptionist at the HWS Counseling Center, call the centers' office at (315) 781-3388, or stay tuned to your HWS e-mail.

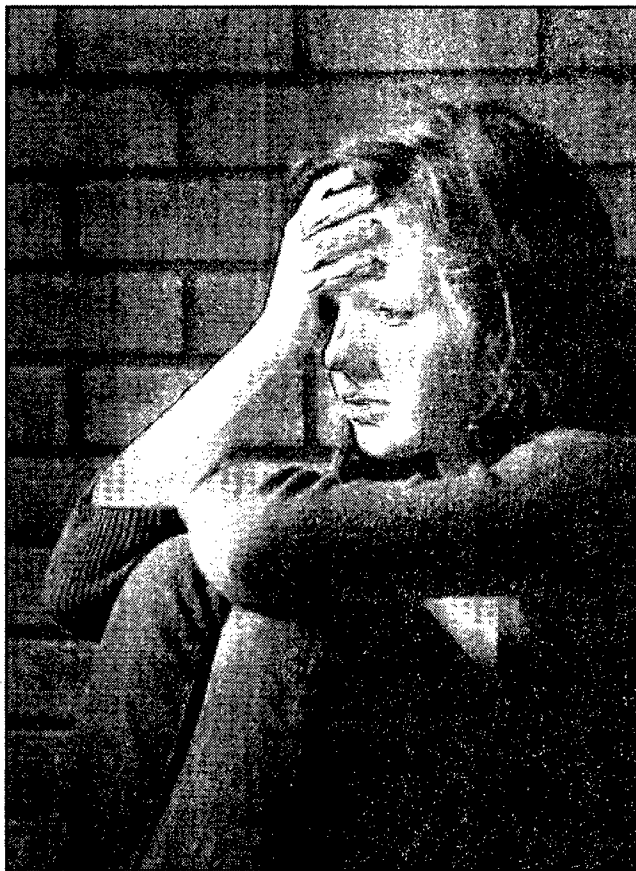


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