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Active Minds National Conference attendees raise awareness for mental illness, stigma

By Utsav Gandhi

CAMPUS EDITOR

Did you know?

1 in 4 students live with a mental health disorder.

1,100 college students die by suicide annually, making it the second leading cause of death for students.

2/3 of students who need help don't seek it out.

Twice as many college students drop out of academics because of mental health disorders than other students.

18-24 years of age is when mental illnesses are most likely to first present themselves.

[Source: Active Minds Inc., www.active-minds.org]

Over the past year, TechNews has been trying to highlight some of the important work that a new Active Minds chapter has been doing at IIT's Main Campus (<http://technewsiit.com/story/active-minds-iit>). "Changing the conversation about mental health" is the mission statement of Active Minds. It seeks to raise awareness of mental health issues in our academic community. For more information on

the mission of Active Minds @IIT, visit their new webpage, <http://mypages.iit.edu/~activeminds>, or email them, activeminds.iit@gmail.com. Over the past weekend, six students represented the chapter at the 8th National Conference at University of Maryland, College Park, MD, and came back enlightened and empowered to raise more awareness about what is an increasingly important issue nationwide on college campuses. The conference was attended by over 600 students from across the nation. TechNews spoke to Russel Houser, Research Liaison for Active Minds @IIT and conference attendee.

Some of the conference highlights included the famous "Send Silence Packing" exhibit—a powerful display of 1,100 donated backpacks and regional stories representing the 1,100 college students who die each year, mostly because they were unwilling or unable to seek help due to lack of information. The Creative Programming expo allowed chapters from around the country to showcase their own successful and innovative programming efforts. Dr. Thomas Insel, director of the National Institute of Mental Health, singer/songwriter Meg Hutchinson (who has used music and writing as a lifeline for people who are unable to reach out for help), and WNBA player Chamique Holdsclaw were the inspiring keynote speakers. A Ph.D student from IIT, Kristin Sokol, who is also the National Active Minds

Emerging Scholar, conducted focus groups to gather feedback on a campus solidarity campaign, modeled after the LGBT "Safe Space" sticker campaign, designed to promote an environment of solidarity and support for students with mental health concerns.

Conference attendees also had the unique opportunity to take part in a pre-conference leadership training session led by the Wellstone Action Network. Sessions included interactive workshops on power, organizing and membership recruitment, and how to apply these specifically to the national mental health movement. There were sessions to train students on how to passionately and accurately talk about sensitive issues, recruiting volunteers and maintaining student membership, applying for grants from the Active Minds Eric Trendell Chapter Development Fund Grant, creating collaborative relationships with the Counseling and Wellness Center, and a workshop on simple yoga exercises to de-stress anytime and anywhere. There were sessions on National Stress Out Day programming, explaining stigma to dispel common myths, eating disorder awareness and the pop culture body-type ideal of Barbie, reaching out to students from various backgrounds and majors.

Look forward to some great events in the upcoming semester and beyond as the chapter makes its presence felt even more on campus.

Student Speak survey results

By Mike Purdy

DISTRIBUTION MANAGER

The results are in from the 2011 Students Speak survey, which was administered by the Center for Research and Service and conducted university-wide from October 21 to November 4. Generally speaking, the executive summary of these survey results displays a big "thumbs up" from the IIT student body, both in terms of the overall student experience and satisfaction with the services of a majority of university departments. Of the 8,180 invitations to complete the survey, 2,760 students responded, which is a response rate of 33 percent. Following a trend from previous years, the undergraduate response rate was higher than that of graduate students, with a 37 and 31 percent response rate, respectively.

In terms of overall student experience, 70 percent of survey respondents indicated that they would recommend IIT to a friend based on their overall experience, and 74 percent would recommend IIT to a friend based solely upon their academic experiences thus far. These two items of the survey showed respective increases of 5 and 3 percent from the previous year's survey results. The overall student experience section of the survey rated students' satisfaction of such core items as respect from IIT staff, a feeling that IIT staff work hard to fulfill their needs, knowledge of which department to contact with questions or problems, and finding that they are able to get an answer or solution as a result of initial contact with an IIT staff member, all of which experienced increases. The only issue showing a decrease from the previous year concerned students' perception of their general safety on campus, and a core item that could use improvement regarding overall experience is the student experience of being a valued member of the IIT community.

From a departmental standpoint, the Bursar's Office reported the most participation in services by students with a 72 percent response rate, followed in order by Dining Services, the Registrar, Financial Aid, the Career Management Center (CMC), Student Health, Housing, Student Life, Public Safety, Student Government, and the Student Center for Diversity and Inclusion. With slight variations between the undergraduate and graduate responses, the student service averages for these departments were rated favorably, aside from three departments, those being Housing and Residential Services, the CMC, and Public Safety (which reported favorable averages of less than 70 percent for the undergraduate population).

For these three departments in need of improvement, students expressed the greatest concern with the core items relating to response time to questions and concerns and the all-around quality of the services and programming provided. Based on a comment analysis of these departments, more specific evidence for student dissatisfaction can be found:

For Housing and Residential Services, a number of students expressed frustration with facilities, maintenance response time and upkeep, the high cost of living, service to the Greek houses, and certain

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Photos courtesy of Utsav Gandhi