ABOUT THE MENTAL HEALTH TASK FORCE

In December 2016, President Monaco launched a university-wide task force dedicated to student mental health. This group is tasked with assessing current policies and services and developing recommendations for meeting the growing needs of a diverse student population.

PURPOSE AND CHARGE

The purpose of the Mental Health Task Force is to conduct a university-wide review and assessment of student mental health, wellness and holistic engagement, including the current student experience, the services offered, available resources and potential areas for additional collaboration and enhancement.

The overall goal of the Mental Health Task Force is to ensure that Tufts University is meeting the needs of our student populations, fostering resilience, and providing a healthy and supportive community in which all students can reach their potential. The Mental Health Task Force will review expert opinion in the context of national and Tufts specific trends in student mental health and its promotion and care, analyze quantitative and qualitative data with respect to our students’ experience, and engage members of the Tufts community and appropriate outside experts to fulfill its charge. The Task Force will include issues related to substance abuse in its assessment and recommendations as appropriate.

The charge of the task force is to:

- Examine the state of student mental health university-wide with attention to the needs and experiences of undergraduate, graduate and professional students in all of Tufts’ Schools. This should include (1) careful attention to the normative personal development of students, and discussion of the faculty and university’s role in supporting it, (2) comparisons to national trends and data, and (3) the intersection between academic and curricular policies and practices with student mental health.
- Assess mental health services and related resources available to help our student populations to address mental health needs, paying careful attention to the particular experiences and needs of diverse groups within the student population and comparison with best practices in evidence-based treatment.
- Review university policies and practices to identify (1) possible barriers to access and utilization of services for students in need, (2) opportunities to strengthen support, and (3) potential updates to ensure Tufts’ continued compliance with applicable state and federal laws, regulations and guidelines.
- Make recommendations that promote the mission of the task force with respect to: (1) education, outreach and mental health promotion, (2) services and resources, and (3) policies and practices.
MEMBERS AND ORGANIZATION

The Task Force is co-chaired by President Monaco and Dr. Paul Summergrad, Psychiatrist-in-Chief; Dr. Frances S. Arkin Professor and Chairman, Department of Psychiatry, Tufts University School of Medicine.

The Task Force is organized into four bodies: the full Task Force, the Working Group focusing on Undergraduate Students, the Working Group focusing on Graduate and Professional Students, and the Models of Care task group focusing on clinical services available on the Medford/Somerville campus. The working groups allow for a broader range of stakeholders to participate in the work of Task Force.

The Working Group focusing on Undergraduate Students is co-chaired by Jennifer Stephan, Senior Associate Dean of Undergraduate Advising at the School of Engineering and Raymond Ou, Senior Associate Dean of Student Affairs for the Schools of Arts and Sciences and Engineering. The Working Group focusing on Graduate and Professional Students is chaired by John Matias, Associate Dean of Admissions and Enrollment at the School of Medicine. The Models of Care Task Group is chaired by Mary Pat McMahon, Dean of Student Affairs for the Schools of Arts and Sciences and Engineering. The two working groups have been working since the spring of 2017; the Task Group convened in the fall of 2017.

Task Force and Working Group Members

* – Member of full Mental Health Task Force
GPWG – Member of the Working Group focusing on Graduate and Professional Students
UWG – Member of the Working Group focusing on Undergraduate Students
MOC – Member of the Models of Care task group

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Assistant Clinical Professor, Department of
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Director of Mind-Body Wellness, Office of
Student Services
STATUS OF TASK FORCE EFFORTS

The full Mental Health Task Force has met six times since December 2016. The goal for the Task Force is complete the work phase of its efforts by the end of the spring 2018 semester, draft a report over the summer of 2018 and release a report to the community in fall of 2018.

GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL WORKING GROUP (GPWG)

The GPWG used the spring of 2017 to understand the range of services available on all our campuses and through individual schools. This fall, the GPWG has focused on three streams of activity: data collection, community engagement, and policy review.
Data Collection. Due to the lack of uniform data collection across our graduate and professional student population the working group elected to implement the Healthy Minds Survey in Boston and Grafton. The graduate students on the Medford/Somerville campus have participated in this survey every two years for some time. All students on the Boston and Grafton campuses were invited to participate in the survey. The survey was open between November 9 and December 1. There was a 30.2% completion rate. On December 8, our team received an initial report from the University of Michigan. This spring, we will receive a more comprehensive report with school specific data.

Community Engagement. The GPWG engaged in community outreach hosting more than 15 listening sessions with students in Boston, Grafton and Medford/Somerville. Next, the working group will review the common themes that emerged from the listening sessions to identify next steps for the working group’s discussions.

Policy Review. In early October, the GPWG convened the Deans of Students from all of the graduate and professional schools to discuss Medical Leave of Absence (MLOA) policies. Dana Fleming from University Counsel presented on best practices and answered questions about MLOA policies. Each of the schools is reviewing its MLOA policy this year.

An overview of the common themes from the listening sessions and the process of initiating the Healthy Minds Survey this fall are available in on Box: December 15: Report of the Graduate and Professional Working Group, presented by John Matias.

MODELS OF CARE (MOC) TASK GROUP

The Models of Care (MOC) Task Group was established over the summer after recognizing a deeper dive was needed to evaluate our clinical services and investigate alternative models of care to meet the increasing volume and complexity of mental health care needs of our students. The MOC focus is on the service model on the Medford/Somerville campus. MOC held two retreats this fall.

Mary Pat’s report at the December 15 Task Force Meeting summarizes the ongoing efforts and challenges this group is considering.

UNDERGRADUATE WORKING GROUP (UWG)

During the spring of 2017 the UWG focused on student engagement and outreach. The primary goals of student outreach were to introduce the Mental Health Task Force to the student population, explain the purpose and charge of the Task Force, and obtain qualitative data on the current state of student mental health. Outreach was conducted by the members and staff of the Task Force.

In total:

- Ten interviews: Interviews were held privately between members of the task force and one or two students, including the leadership of Active Minds and Ears for Peers.
- Nine listening sessions: Listening sessions were open sessions targeting certain populations in order to highlight specific needs. The focus for each of these sessions were General, International, Asian/Asian-American, Black/African-American, Latinx, School at the Museum of Fine Arts, Engineers, Low-Income and First Generation, and Seniors (Class of 2017).
• Five organizations: Task force members were invited to speak at the meetings of several organizations. These were the Tufts Community Union Senate, the Pan-Asian Council, the Africana Advisory Alliance, Tufts Emergency Medical Services, and the Interfaith Council

• Eight online comments. These comments were submitted via the president’s website. One student was engaged in a follow up interview.

• One class of approximately 70 students was engaged for one lecture period and asked to complete a survey related to their perceptions of mental health at Tufts.

• In April, task force members attended the Mental Health Monologues – an annual campus-wide event for students to share their and others’ stories about mental health.

A thematic summary was compiled of recurring themes and concerns generated throughout student engagement. They reflect the concerns, needs, and recommendations that students expressed in regards to their personal mental health as well as that of the broader campus. The themes expand beyond clinical services to include topics such as relationships with faculty, the residential life, family pressures, and campus community. University policies and practices such as leave of absence policies, return from hospitalization policies, financial aid and accommodations generated passionate feedback from students during these sessions.

Given the strong expressed interest in policies and practices, the UGW choose to focus their work over the summer on policy review. The UWG reviewed the following policies:

• Medical leave of absence
• Personal leave of absence
• Academic probation and withdrawal
• Non-judicial outcomes for incidents encompassed by Good Samaritan and Amnesty policies
• Return from Hospitalization

Additionally, the UGW heard from other administrators to gain a better understanding of related policies and considerations including:

• Financial aid considerations taking a leave of absence: Patricia Reilly, Director of Financial Aid
• Considerations for international students taking a leave of absence: Neriliz Soto Gonzalez, International Center
• Reduced Course Load policy: Kirsten Behling, Director of Student Accessibility Services

Students with mental health conditions may present and depart the university via the Medical Leave of Absence policy, the Personal Leave Absence policy or by Academic Withdrawal. However, each policy has different considerations and circumstances for a student departing from and returning to the university.
## Comparison of Leave Policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circumstances for Leave</th>
<th>Medical Leave</th>
<th>Personal Leave</th>
<th>Academic Withdrawal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fully tend to a physical or mental health need</td>
<td>Any</td>
<td>Academic performance meets the criteria for academic probation for a second semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript</td>
<td>Student may choose to have all courses removed from transcript for semester in which they seek leave</td>
<td>Leave recorded on transcript; normal deadlines for withdrawing from classes apply after the start of the semester</td>
<td>Recorded on transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit Process</td>
<td>Involves consultation with DoSA, advising team and medical documentation; highly individualized but formal process</td>
<td>Initiated by student via SIS and approved by Alpha Dean</td>
<td>Notified by the Academic Standing Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of Leave</td>
<td>Not defined; no limit</td>
<td>Typically designated at the time of departure</td>
<td>One semester</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Financial Aid Considerations | • Refund calculations are based on date of leave; detailed worksheet used to determine percent of aid eligible for refund  
• Eligible for 8 semesters of federal financial aid; leave/academic withdrawal may have an impact on academic progress rules  
• Mid-semester leave counts towards the 8 semesters of eligible aid even if the student does not receive credit, nor are all funds dispersed  
• Loans may go into repayment after 6 mo.  
• Students may appeal for 9th semester of funding through Tufts grants | |
| Other Financial Considerations | First 6 weeks of a semester, students are eligible for reimbursement of a percentage of tuition, decreasing as each week passes. No reimbursement after the 6th week. | |
| Academic Considerations | A student with an official leave date after the tuition reimbursement period in a given semester will have that semester count toward the residency requirement | |
| Considerations for International Students | May stay in the U.S. for up to 12 months while seeking care | May not stay in the U.S. during personal leave; depending on duration of leave may need to reapply for visa | May not stay in the U.S. while on academic withdrawal; depending on timing, may need to reapply for visa |
| Presence on Campus during Leave | Not permitted on campus; may not attend co-curricular activities on campus while on leave | Permitted on campus | Permitted on campus |
| Participation in Housing Lottery Prior to Return | Not permitted | Yes | Yes |
| Class Registration Prior to Return | Not permitted | Yes | Yes |
| Return Process | Initiated by student by sending notification of intent to return to DoSA; highly structured readmission process | Initiated by student via SIS; no formal return readmission process | Initiated by student via SIS; no formal return readmission process |
Following the policy review over the summer, the UWG developed sixteen policy recommendations. Jennifer Stephan and Raymond Ou presented the findings and objectives of the UWG’s policy recommendations to the full Mental Health Task Force on October 20.

On December 15, the full Mental Health Task Force accepted the UWG’s recommendations and agreed to engage relevant university stakeholders working towards advancing the recommendations with the hopes that some policy changes may be possible for AY18-19.

**Policy Recommendations**

**Personal Leave**

**Recommendation #1:** Put into place exit and return procedures for taking personal leaves to ensure students are given access to campus resources.

**Medical Leave**

**Recommendation #2:** Consider how students may remain connected with the community while on leave, including access to campus and other resources.

**Recommendation #3:** Request ORLL to consider the feasibility of reserving campus housing for students who may be intending to return from medical leave in future semesters; the newly hired off-campus professional may also be asked to assist students returning from leave with housing options.

**Recommendation #4:** Consider permitting students to register for courses in the semester before their intended return from medical leave.

**Recommendation #5:** Assess whether external clinician evaluations of a student’s readiness to return is sufficient for approving returns from medical leave.

**Recommendation #6:** Responding to student feedback, the working group recommends the university evaluate the exit and return procedures for taking medical leave to ensure students receive adequate guidance and support prior to exiting the university and streamline approval process for students returning from medical leave.

**Recommendation #7:** Explore possible benefits of broader use of tuition refund insurance. Relevant issues for review may include:

- costs, benefits and access for students with a range of financial needs or aid situations,
- further educating students returning from medical leave about the potential value of purchasing tuition refund insurance, and,
- changing the existing “opt-in” policy to include tuition refund insurance as an “opt-out” selection.

**Recommendation #8:** Codify procedure for notifying the International Center when international students take a leave of absence, initiating the appropriate process relative to their visa status.
Recommendation #9: Engage stakeholders including DOSA, Advising Deans, the International Center and Financial Aid office to evaluate current practices for determining the effective date of medical leave applications.

Study Abroad

Recommendation #10: Review the information provided to students studying abroad in advance of departure and resources available while away, taking a comprehensive view including Tufts Study Abroad programs, the Tufts European Center and non-Tufts programs. The task force further recommends formalizing a return from study abroad process to support students making the transition back to campus life.

Accommodations

Recommendation #11: Encourage DOSA, Advising teams, and SAS to advise students who may be eligible for accommodations available through SAS, such as Reduced Course Load. As part of the return from medical leave process, the task force recommends that students receive guidance on the accommodations available through SAS and the Reduced Course Load policy.

Academic Policies and Practices

Recommendation #12: Evaluate current faculty academic policies and administrative practices to ensure early identification and intervention to help encourage struggling students to engage with resources. Relevant academic policies and practices for consideration may include:

- academic standing criteria and academic progress policies and related financial aid implications for student success,
- midterm notification of student performance,
- deadlines course withdraw and incomplete policy, and,
- transcript treatment of courses enrolled prior to a medical leave.

Supporting these Policy Recommendations

Recommendation #13: Assess staffing resources necessary to support any adopted recommendations.

Recommendation #14: Engage in a comprehensive communication campaign to increase transparency and awareness of policies and procedures related to medical leaves, mental health support and resources. This campaign should include a wide-range of audiences that make up the Tufts community including, students, parents, faculty and staff.

Recommendation #15: Evaluate of any adopted changes to policies or procedures resulting from the Mental Health Task Force after a designated period of time.

Recommendation #16: Support further identification of incentives for students to take MLOA.