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## UA Does not adequately support students with mental illnesses

By Cassie Kuhn (<http://www.cw.ua.edu/staff/cassie-kuhn>) | 03/21/2017 9:26pm



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# illnesses%20%7C%20The%20Crimson%20White&body=Hi%20there%2C%0A%0ACheck%20does-not-adequately-support-students-with-mental-illnesses)

Midterms are barely behind us, and many of the University's students are under unbelievably high stress levels trying to maintain or raise their grades. With the consequences for a failed class as serious as delayed graduation or the loss of a scholarship, academics can be a source of intense stress and anxiety for college students. The academic stresses many students are under only exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions, which many are struggling with. Depending on which study or survey you read, statistics on the percentage of college students with mental illnesses vary. However, this much is clear all across the board: many college students struggle with anxiety, depression and other mental illnesses, and most are not receiving adequate support to manage and treat these illnesses.

For one thing, there is still a pretty strong stigma associated with mental illness. Volunteering at the University's Out of the Darkness suicide awareness walk in October, I overheard many students' conversations with one another as they waited in line to fill out forms, get their T-shirts, and prepare for the walk. The conversations were peppered with jokes about suicide, and the levity and sarcasm with which the topic was broached was astounding. While I believe firmly that the majority of students on our campus are good people who care about one another, it was disheartening to hear so many students talk about serious mental health issues as if they were appropriate subjects for casual jokes.

Of course, to be fair to these students, talking about mental illness is hard. It's difficult to have open, honest conversations about topics like these. The topics are painful, and they can make us really uncomfortable. In order to overcome the stigma surrounding mental illnesses on college campuses, it's important that we make sure we're having open, honest and serious conversations about mental health with our friends and that we don't let potentially harmful jokes about mental illness go unchecked.

But individual students can only accomplish so much if they are set against an administration that won't work with them to make it a little easier to get help and support. Last Tuesday, students elected Jared Hunter as SGA president. While both of his opponents made mental health their primary platform concern, Hunter's main priority is making the dining dollar system better. Clearly, we have some work to do in terms of making mental health an issue all students care about. For the next year or so, students seeking support with mental illnesses will probably have to take getting help into their own hands, because our machine-backed SGA president certainly isn't going to help. This being said, The University of Alabama could do a little better to make mental health resources easier to find.

The UA Counseling Center website is helpful, if you spend long enough searching for what should probably be front and center, or at least a little more conspicuously placed, on the website: the location and cost of counseling services. The good news is that an initial consultation appointment is free. Afterward, each appointment is \$15, which is doable for many students. For those who cannot afford the fee, accommodations can likely be made. The UA Counseling website's location is next to the Law School at 1000 South Lawn Office Building (1101 Jackson Avenue). But how many students get that far? How many of your classmates and friends could tell you where to go to talk to a counselor? How many of your classmates and friends would be too afraid to seek help, making dismissive statements like, "I'm just stressed," or "I'm just having a bad week, I'm fine."

The fact of the matter is that at The University of Alabama, apathy regarding mental health on an administrative level combines with a debilitating social stigma to keep many students from getting the mental health support they need. Students and administrators can and should do better.

*Cassie Kuhn is a freshman majoring in math and political science. Her column runs biweekly.*

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