

# JED Campus Executive Summary

## Truman State University – July 2018



Truman State University partnered with The Jed Foundation (JED) in Fall 2017 to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of their programs, policies and systems to support the emotional well-being of their students and the prevention of suicide and substance abuse. This document is a summary of Truman State's action plan which was informed by the JED Campus assessment tool, data from the Healthy Minds Study, a meeting with Truman students and a meeting with Truman's JED Campus team.

We were very pleased to see such an engaged team gathered together for our visit that was representative of multiple stakeholders on campus. It is obvious that the well-being of your students is a priority and that you have created a caring, compassionate community. From our review, it appears that Truman State is doing some amazing work in support of student emotional well-being. You have a large amount of supportive programming conducted by various departments across campus. Your students report feeling a strong sense of community and care deeply about their peers. You have strong AOD policies and your health and counseling departments are housed under the same wellness center.

There are also some unique challenges for students at Truman State. Truman recruits high achieving students who continue to put a lot of pressure on themselves and each other to excel. The concept of a "typical Truman student", one who prioritizes academics and achievement above all else, is pervasive. The pressure to fit this mold seems to be perpetuated by families as well as faculty and staff. Students, in response, do not prioritize self-care. Truman is also challenged by its geographic location. Limited referral and treatment options in your area can create challenges for students to access necessary care.

As evident by our observations above, factors that influence student well-being are widespread and not confined to mental health and wellness services. It will be critical for the entire college community – faculty, administrators, and students - to engage in this collaborative effort. Specifically, we suggest engaging international student services, multicultural affairs, and career services to join the current team, as well as public safety. We look forward to working with you on using your Healthy Minds Study data and other institutional data, of which much was identified during the visit, to inform the recommendations below.

A critical component of the success of this program will be the promotion of a culture of caring and shared responsibility for student emotional well-being. An annual communication plan to promote student well-being should be developed, including regular messaging from the president and senior administration to the campus community, detailing how mental health is an institutional priority and sharing the progress of this work. Messaging should be shared with students, faculty, alumni, parents, and other stakeholders. It may be worthwhile to create an online portal or website specifically related to wellness and emotional health. This portal could be used to keep the community informed of the work of the task force and could serve to be a single repository for all programming and resources related to health and wellness from across campus that students could access.

### **Strategic Planning**

Strategic planning allows schools to anticipate and evaluate policies, systems and programming needs,

examine how they deploy both personnel and financial resources to address challenges, coordinate efforts across campus, and evaluate effectiveness. A strategic plan has been distributed to Truman College's JED Campus Team. Ongoing collaboration with JED will focus on implementation of this plan over the next 3 years. Highlights of this plan are shared below, divided into domains of JED's Comprehensive Approach.



### **Develop Life Skills**

Supporting life skills education is valuable in teaching healthy ways to cope with the stress of college life. Some of the life skills that are important to a student's well-being include managing friendships and relationships, problem solving, decision making, identifying and managing emotions, healthy living, and finding life purpose, meaning and identity.

Truman offers so many well-reviewed programs in this area. But it is unclear if all of this programming is reaching all students, particularly international and transfer students. It may be beneficial for the institution to audit all programming, assess its current efficacy and reach, and focus on campus-wide coordination of efforts to meet specific student development milestones. Because Truman students did report that they were very busy and stressed for time, strategizing ways to teach these skills to students in ways that do not require in person attendance at extracurricular programming will be critical. Potential solutions are curricular infusion, expanded orientation initiatives, and as part of your new wellness requirement in 2019.

### **Promote Social Connectedness**

Research has shown that loneliness and isolation are significant risk factors for mental health problems and/or suicidal behavior. Therefore, supportive social relationships and feeling connected to campus, family and friends are protective factors that can help lower risk.

Students find connections in many ways. You have resident advisors and orientation leaders who help to serve as initial mentors for students. Your Greek orgs also seem to have a strong presence on your campus and serve as a source of connection for many students. Be sure that all of these groups as well as others that serve as student leaders have consistent training on identify and support students who may be isolated. It will be important to further analyze your Healthy Minds Study data and other institutional data to determine if there are individual sub-populations who are more isolated than others and create outreach initiatives specific to these groups. In the visit, we discussed focusing specifically on students of color, first generation students, and transfer students, but you should let your data guide the work in this area.

### **Identify Students At Risk**

Research shows that many college students who need help do not seek it out on their own. Therefore, it is important to take action to identify students at risk for mental health problems and/or suicidal behavior, and also promote emotional health awareness among those who interact with students the most, such as residence hall staff, academic advisors, faculty and even fellow students, as it is vital for these people to be able to recognize and refer a student who might be in distress.

We were glad to hear that all students complete health history forms allowing students to disclose mental health or substance use histories. You should create a system that allows Truman to proactively reach out to those who disclose and connect them with campus resources to aid in transition of care. Educate parents and families about the importance of this disclosure and planning for support in the new environment.

JED would also recommend more opportunities for students to be screened for mental health and substance use issues, either online, in the health center, or at health promotion events. Truman should consider adding case management staff who could aid in supporting those who screen positive with mild symptomatology. Case managers can be housed in either the health and counseling centers or Dean of Students office. They can aid in this work, the outreach mentioned above, and many other recommendations in this summary.

JED recommends that all faculty, administrators, and staff be trained in identifying, supporting and referring students with mental health issues. Senior leadership should make this an expectation of employees as an institutional value. Similarly, every effort should be made to train students on how to support and help their peers. At a minimum, this should be required of all student leaders and mentors, but providing this type of training to all students as part of orientation and/or other first-year experience programs would be ideal.

### **Increasing Help Seeking Behavior**

Many students who need help may be reluctant or unsure of how to seek it out. Obstacles to help-seeking include lack of awareness of services, skepticism about the effectiveness of treatment, prejudices associated with mental illness, and uncertainty about costs or insurance coverage. Campuses should engage in a variety of activities designed to increase the likelihood that a student in need will seek help.

In our review, we found that information about wellness was hard to find on the website and your staff agreed. The most important thing Truman can do to increase access to this type of information, and thus promote help-seeking, is to review, consolidate, update and house all wellness resources in a single location. Ensure that specific staff are tasked with regularly curating this material and intentionally market this information to the student community. This is another duty that could be managed by a case manager.

### **Provide Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services**

Truman State's counseling center ratio meets IACS standards, although we identified that you did have deficient counseling coverage in the summer months. JED recommends considering hiring a doctoral level practitioner, increasing coverage in the summer, and establishing a robust and thorough professional development plan for your counseling staff. Even though you are in a rural area, it would be helpful to improve and increase referral resources and develop Memoranda of Understanding with those service providers you frequently use. Again, JED would recommend considering the creation of case manager positions to aid in providing additional support to students. Case managers can help navigate off-campus referrals and issues related to insurance, allowing clinicians in the counseling center to spend more time providing timely direct services to those students with more critical needs.

Truman State should comprehensively review all leave policies (medical, mandatory, return from leave, etc.) and include the Vice President of Student Affairs, academic support, health and counseling, and the registrar in the conversation. Leave policies should be structured to encourage students who need to take a leave to do so and to best support their success upon their return to campus. All policies should be streamlined, well-coordinated, transparent, and well-publicized. If possible, offering tuition insurance to your students can eliminate financial concerns for those students who may need to take a leave of absence.

Access to and coordination of mental health care is very important. One barrier to students accessing care is the absence of comprehensive health insurance coverage. You currently require insurance of all international students, but JED would recommend that Truman offer a college-sponsored health insurance policy with adequate mental health and substance abuse coverage and require that all students have insurance.

With regard to substance abuse, Truman should develop response protocols for students who are transported for potential overdoses. JED can provide recommendations. Establishing a recovery community or partnering with those in Kirksville is advised. JED recommends creating strategically timed messaging campaigns regarding the dangers of substance use and prescription drug diversion. Given the increase of opiate use on campuses, educating your students about these drugs is also critical. We were pleased to hear that your public safety and health center staff are trained in the administration of naloxone to avert death by opiate overdose. Consider how you can continue to expand the number of individuals trained on your campus.

### **Follow Crisis Management Procedures**

It is essential to have policies and protocols in place to respond effectively to crises on campus and to ensure the safety of the campus community. Be sure that emergency resources are adequately shared and marketed to students and consider adding a text-based crisis service. We were pleased that you had an adequate postvention protocol. Critical to the success of the implementation of this protocol will be to educate faculty and staff about the process, so that messages are consistent across campus in the event of a tragedy. Truman should also be sure to review this protocol and train new participants annually and debrief the protocol after each future incident.

### **Restrict Access to Lethal Means**

It has been well established that if the means to self-harm are removed or limited in an environment, it can prevent suicide and even limit accidental deaths. Begin engaging facilities and security staff in doing annual environmental scans of the campus to identify areas of risk and create a plan to mitigate them in the long term. If possible, implement installation of breakaway closet rods to reduce the risk of death by hanging. Be sure that as new construction projects are developed, they are examined through a means restriction lens as well. Finally, while Truman has medication deactivation pouches for drug disposal, many may not be aware. We recommend further promoting this or offering drug collection boxes in the health center, counseling center, and/or security offices.