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Opinion: How Mental Health has been Impacted by the Pandemic

Jordan Revenaugh
Editor-in-Chief

When we think of mental health during the pandemic, I'm sure we're all aware of the acute pains of worsening anxiety and depression. We've all felt them, to some extent.

We've all felt the pressing nervousness of what tomorrow's COVID-19 case count will be. We've all had mornings where we've struggled to peel off our sheets and get out of bed. We've all felt stress thinking about the unpredictability of the ever-changing world around us.

"There are so many unknowns, so many things that are out of our control," said Frank Keleman, head of Albion College Counselling Services. "It's the perfect storm for stress and anxiety. I've been talking to students about differentiating between what you normally think about as clinical anxiety, generalized anxiety and anxiety that you see during this time, which is COVID anxiety. If you're not anxious now, you're not thinking. You're not awake. It's just a very, very anxiety inducing time."

The American Psychiatric Association estimates that 47 million Americans, which equates to roughly 20% of the population, struggle with a diagnosable mental illness in a given year. While that is a high statistic, it also means that 80% of individuals, the majority of the population, don't struggle with a diagnosable mental illness in an average year.

So, even though day to day anxieties and bouts of depression have been talked about at length, what's less talked about is the relapse and regression of other serious mental disorders, which includes more severe cases of anxiety and depression.

If 20% of all adults struggle with mental illness on an average year, considering that this year has been anything but average, it's more likely that the percentage of adults struggling in 2020 has been even higher.

In the college students population, the number of individuals struggling is even higher.

"It's pretty well known that particularly 18- to 22-year-old college students, according to the American College Associations surveys the past several years, have shown significant increases in anxiety levels and depression levels among college students," said Keleman. "Some of the surveys have indicated that over 80% of college students report debilitating anxiety at some point in their career. And there's reports in the 70s of students saying that they feel so down they can't get out of bed. This has been seen nationally, increases in depression and anxiety among college students. And there's multiple reasons for that."

In the midst of COVID-19, college students' normal anxieties regarding classwork, responsibilities for sports or other organizations, and more are heightened by outside factors.

"The pandemic makes it worse, certainly. One of the ways you can help yourself is by being with friends," said Keleman. "And in the situation we're in, there's a lot of isolation, there's a lot fewer opportunities to get together and see people face-to-face. There's virtual opportunities, which is helpful, but it's different. It doesn't have the same impact of being with people where you can touch them or be close to people socially. I think there are a number of reasons that make this pandemic difficult on college students."

The National Empowerment Center claims that mental disorders, particularly those rooted in past trauma, develop as a coping mechanism for an individual when faced with trying times, and trying times have been plentiful thus far in 2020.

So, using that logic, when times are trying, someone with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), for example, depends on the cyclical, consistent nature of obsessions and compulsions when the world seems undependable or inconsistent. Someone with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) relives the past to escape his/her current reality. Someone with an eating disorder focuses on exercising control over food or his/her body when the world seems out of control.

As the world's knowledge of COVID-19 has grown, we have come to understand that some people are more likely to contract the virus than others based off pre-existing conditions. The CDC cites that mental illness during a pandemic shares a similar trait: Those who have

See **Mental Health** on back!



"My mask was actually made by my grandma, she made me one for each day of the week. They're also hospital approved because she works at a hospital right now. I wear a mask because it's the smart and safe thing to do. Albion is really asking very little to keep us all safe, so I think this is the least we can do," said Tori Wiese, a senior from Marquette, Mich. (Photo by Peach Norman).



"My mask is from InstaCart because I did shopping for them over the summer. I really like it, it's super nice and has adjustable straps in the back, which are pretty nice. I mask to keep others safe and because it's the nice thing to do," said Jessie Butchley, a senior from Crystal Lake, Ill. (Photo by Peach Norman Owen).



"I wear a mask because it's considerate and you keep others safe. I think Albion has been doing pretty well and I'm quite proud of Albion," said Annette Verga, a senior from Shelby Township, Mich. (Photo by Peach Norman Owen).

Get the Best Out of Your Masks

Aura Ware
Features Editor

Types of Masks

One of the easiest ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is by simply wearing a mask. Some masks, however, are more efficient than others at mitigating the pervasiveness of the virus.

Disposable Surgical Masks

Surgical masks are three times more efficient at blocking out viruses than regular homemade masks, and they often come in bulk, allowing for easy disposal after a long day of blocking out COVID-19 germs.

These masks, and other disposable masks, are good for those who experience mascne, acne developed by constant face mask wear, because they prevent the buildup of facial bacteria within the mask after each wear. With their built-in nose wires, surgical masks also help people who wear glasses combat fogging.

Cloth Masks

Cloth masks are both efficient and easy on acne prone skin



It's important to know what masks are protecting you and others from COVID-19. It's even more important to wear one to stop the spread of the virus (Photo by Aura Ware).

because they don't contain harsh products that other masks contain, including certain plastics that trap and hold in bacteria.

Cloth masks do not have built-in filters. Filters are an important piece to masks because they provide a protective barrier that filters out the bacteria and germs in the breath that spreads between the mouth, the mask and people. There are filters that can be bought or created and easily installed.

Homemade Masks

Although homemade masks aren't as effective as surgical masks, they still can combat COVID-19. These masks, however, must be made properly. One-layer cotton masks, for example, have been shown to be one of the least effective ways to stop the virus.

Many homemade masks are just one or two layers of material, which is why they are typically not as effective. However, according to a recent paper published by researchers in the United Kingdom, homemade masks with three layers, also known as "hybrid" masks, are the most effective kind of homemade masks. Hybrid masks are the best kinds of homemade masks because hybrid is the name of a high grade cotton that creates one of the best kinds of filtration of germs and bacteria.

Scarves and Cotton T-Shirt Masks

Oftentimes people cannot purchase or create their own effective masks, so they wrap scarves and cotton shirts around their faces to go out in public.

While one-layer cotton masks are not very effective, according to the Journal of Hospital Infection study, T-shirts and scarves reduce infection risk by roughly 44 percent.

Do masks affect your oxygen levels?

Although masks can be uncomfortable to wear, according to the World Health Organization, they do not cause oxygen deficiency or an influx in the amount of carbon dioxide taken in, which can lead to carbon dioxide intoxication.

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Albion College's Adjusted Approach to Campus Events

Paola Amaya
Staff Writer

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Albion College has put forth an effort to maintain a lively social atmosphere on campus.

"This semester, campus programming is different because we have the added responsibility of keeping people safe by following COVID-19 guidelines established by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention], the State of Michigan, local authorities, and the college itself," said Kristen Sarniak, assistant director for Greek Life and Student Organizations.

While some events on campus have been able to maintain an in-person format despite new rules and regulations, others have shifted to a virtual or hybrid platform.

Talks, seminars and other events that typically see a larger turnout of attendance, for example, are being held completely online. This approach is accessible to students and staff on campus. The format also allows for a recording of the event to be made accessible to students who were not able to attend.

"I haven't attended any of the events this year," said Ray Paige, a senior from

Farmington Hills, Mich. "The virtual events take away the fun of being in person."

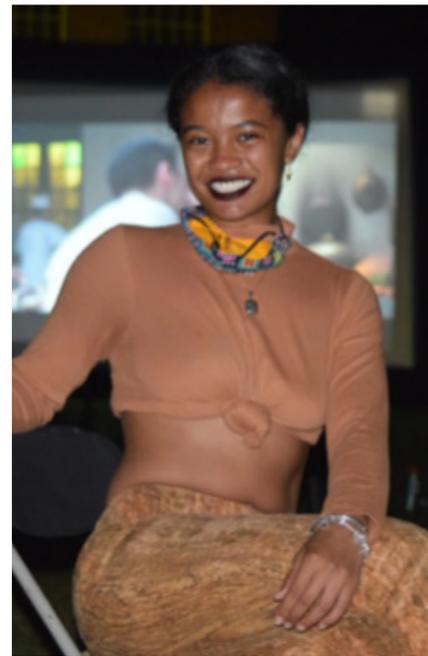
One of the biggest annual events on campus is Briton Bash, which, this year, was held virtually through Engage, Albion's new student organization management platform.

"A virtual Briton Bash was a great opportunity for folks who don't necessarily feel comfortable in crowds to explore the opportunities for involvement on campus," said Sarniak. "I try to remember that even though there are new challenges, there are also opportunities to look at what we're doing in a new and innovative way."

In-person events, such as movie nights on the quad, have had certain regulations to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. These regulations include an attendance capacity, mask-wearing and social distancing.

"I liked the movie events, but the events need to be advertised more, deadass," said Tim Bullock, a sophomore from Dayton, Ohio. "I did not hear about them until my friends told me."

A hybrid approach is also used to accommodate students who would prefer attending events in-person or online due



A student poses on the quad in front of the projection of the movie "Crazy Rich Asians," hosted by AAG (Photo by Patrick Smoker).

to quarantining and comfort level, like the mentalist show that took place on Aug. 20.

Due to the new regulations, especially social distancing, most of the in-person events have taken place outside on the quad where there is room for attendees to spread out.

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Mental Health

previously struggled with mental illness fall into a category of people more likely to have a severe stress response during the pandemic. Thus, the pandemic can trigger relapses into unhealthy coping mechanisms and mental illnesses.

Although COVID-19 is, obviously, a pressing issue, there is more going on in the world outside of the pandemic as well. Unfortunately, given the nature of those things, they tend to add to our stress levels rather than alleviate them.

"It's not just the pandemic. It's important that we recognize that there's so much more going on in the world that is causing tremendous amounts of stress," said Keleman. "The racial issues that are so prevalent and so difficult to manage, the fires out west - We have students from California, and it seems like the whole west coast is ablaze from Los Angeles to Seattle. You see the pictures and it's scary. We have climate change issues, so many things. And for those who are politically active, there are concerns about what's going to happen in this election. There are so many things on all of our minds that make life more stressful."

Moving forward in a positive way

In the midst of this raging mental health crisis, not all hope is lost. There are still things we can do to help ourselves, and many of those things start with simple, day-to-day habits.

"Self care is essential," said Keleman. "Taking time to sleep. Taking time during the day even though you have these schedules to take a break, do something fun, do something relaxing. There are free meditation apps, using things like that throughout the day to break up the stress, because I think the workload and the stress load this year is higher for individuals, so taking time on a regular basis throughout the day to do something that's not stressful."

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Spaces for Secluded Study During COVID-19

Samantha Semerau
Staff Writer

As a part of Albion College's Together Safely plan for the Fall 2020 semester, administration made many adjustments to promote social distancing on campus. One of these adjustments includes socially distant study areas.

Whether it is an old space that has been updated or a new space that has just been introduced, there are numerous spaces on campus where students can get out of their dorm, put on a mask and get some studying done.

Science Complex Atrium

At the crossroads of what used to be four individual buildings, Norris, Putnam, Kresge and Palenske make up the Science Complex Atrium. The atrium offers multiple spaces for students to study

safely with its large open space and natural lighting.. In addition to large gaps between study spaces, chairs and tables are placed against walls to limit the number of close passerbys.

The Science Complex, including the atrium, is open from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday through Sunday.

Kresge Hallway Lounges

In addition to the atrium, the Science Complex has other study spaces to offer, some of which can be found in the hallways connecting Kresge to Putnam. Like the atrium, these spaces existed before the Fall 2020 but have been slightly adjusted to reflect social distancing.

Though these lounges receive heavier passerby traffic than the atrium and offer less space to socially distance, the cozy

atmosphere and scenic view of campus offer a peaceful spot to get work done. The available outlets in the lab table also gives students the opportunity to work while plugged in.

The Science Complex, including the hallway lounges, is open 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday through Sunday.

The Stockwell-Mudd Library Bridge

The bridge connecting Stockwell Memorial to Mudd in the Stockwell-Mudd Library was previously a site supporting both group and solo study sessions. In the age of COVID-19, the bridge looks much different.

In the spaces where four person booths used to occupy, there are now single booth seats facing the wall to limit any potential contact between studying students and passerbys. Similarly, tables that once held two chairs now only host one seat.

In addition to these adjusted seats is the isolated study pod, which was moved from Mudd to the bridge. The pod contains a seat surrounded by plastic barriers to minimize distractions, an adjustable table top, a desk lamp and outlets.

The Mudd library, including the bridge, is open Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m.

to 11 p.m.; Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; and Sunday from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Mudd Library First Floor

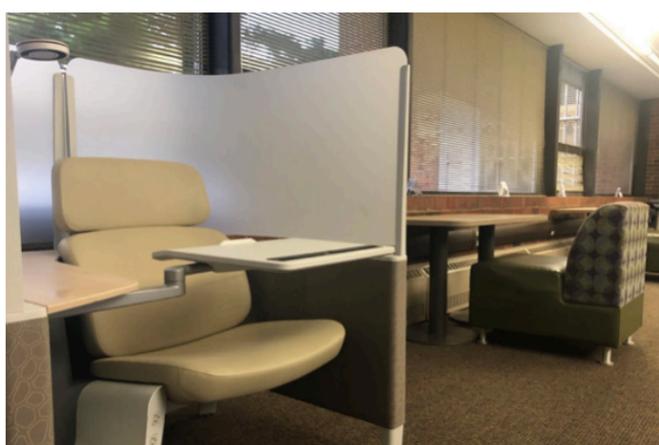
Another classic study space that has been adjusted to reflect social distancing is the first floor of the Mudd library. Like the bridge, this space was previously an area suitable for large group study and individual study.

For the Fall 2020 semester, seating options have been removed and furniture has been distanced to accommodate secluded studying. A set of four campus computers are still available for use but are offset on table islands from each other to maximize distance between students.

Though this is a popular space for studying, the large space and distanced furniture ensures safety while studying, even during the library's busiest times.

The Mudd library is open Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m.; Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; and Sunday from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Read more at albionpleiad.com



An isolated study pod occupies the now-distanced Stockwell-Mudd Library bridge study area. Previously a site of group study sessions, the bridge has been updated to encourage solo studying (Photo by Samantha Semerau).

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Online at albionpleiad.com
Contact us at pleiad@albion.edu

FALL 2020 STAFF

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Managing Editor: Irene Corona Avila
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Photographers: Peach Norman Owen, Patrick Smoker

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