Dear Friends,

As the spring semester ends, it’s a time for students to reflect on their many accomplishments and for our seniors, a time to celebrate graduation on May 7, 2022. However, not all students are able to celebrate as challenges continue to mount. And a particularly serious concern is the challenges of mental illness that thousands of students face.

These past few years of living through a pandemic have been difficult for college students across the country. Many lived in isolation, and experienced alienation, marginalization and loneliness. All that led to disengagement from normal routines setting the stage for experiencing some form of mental illness. Mental illness among college students have been on the rise for years. The pandemic didn’t create mental illness but rather brought attention to a crisis that has been building for some time. According to the American College Health Association, prior to the pandemic, 60% of U.S. students felt overwhelming anxiety while 40% experienced depression so severe they struggled to function, thought about suicide and self-injury.

~ continued on page 2 ~
The month of May is recognized as mental health awareness month. It is a time when it is important to bring attention to mental illness and its impact on so many. Every year, millions of Americans are faced with living with such illness. According to the Mental Health America, reports revealed that in 2017-2018, nearly 20 percent of people surveyed reported experiencing a mental illness, an increase of 1.5 million people over the year before. And college students aren’t exempt from mental illness, including anxiety and depression.

For many young adults, attending a university can be a time to study, play and discover things to assist in the growth and maturity process. Colleges and universities have more to offer current students today. I often reflect on my idyllic time in college, where there was so much freedom and autonomy. I can’t help but think about the many close calls I had as a newly independent person. I remember a few times when I found myself in dangerous parts of town watching intoxicated friends engage in reckless mischief.

Parents of college students have a myriad of concerns for the safety and wellbeing of their child. However, mental illness often goes undiagnosed in students. As a result, colleges and universities across the county are struggling to meet the increasing demand of mental health services. No matter how affluent or popular a person may become, anxiety and depression can put a stranglehold on their functioning, preventing them from having a productive and rewarding college experience. All populations of college students experience some form of mental illness, including thoughts of suicide. And the numbers seeking treatment vary among underrepresented students compared to their white counterparts.

Many studies reveal significant disparities across race and ethnicity relative to treatment among students of color compared to white students. And Asian American students have the lowest occurrence of treatment for mental health conditions at approximately 20 percent. Some studies also suggest that attitudes on mental health treatment vary a lot which could help explain some of the disparities. Overall, college students of color represent a significant population with greater levels of unmet mental health needs.

Many university campuses, including East Tennessee State University are more diverse today than at any other time in their history. Students of color make up over 45 percent of college populations. Even though there have been significant increases in student diversity, racial disparities continue to remain significant, including seeking help and support for mental illness. Many students report that feelings of anxiety caused lower grades on exams, leading to worse academic performances.

I encourage you to seek help if you are experiencing any form of depression, anxiety or any mental health challenge that is interrupting your functioning. I understand that you may feel embarrassed to talk about it or dismiss it all together from a cultural perspective. But there is help available for you. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the ETSU mental health helpline 423-439-4841.
Continued ~ Message from Dr. Keith Johnson

There are many ways that they can support you. As we strive to meet the challenges associated with mental illness before us in higher education, we keep in mind that our core values are:

- **PEOPLE** come first, are treated with dignity and respect, and are encouraged to achieve their full potential.
- **RELATIONSHIPS** are built on honesty, integrity, and trust.
- **DIVERSITY** of people and thought is respected.
- **EXCELLENCE** is achieved through teamwork, leadership, creativity, and a strong work ethic.
- **EFFICIENCY** is achieved through wise use of human and financial resources.
- **COMMITMENT** to intellectual achievement is embraced.

Sincerely,
Dr. Keith Johnson

---

Office of Equity and Inclusion’s Newest Publication

COMMUNITY VOICES
Helping People Hear Each Other...
One Story at a Time

[Click here](#) to learn more.

---

Divisive Concepts

[The Faculty’s Guide to the Divisive Concepts Act](#)
by Mark A. Fulks, Esq., University Counsel
Throughout this pandemic, we have faced isolation, turmoil and unrest, and a growing number of Americans experienced mental health symptoms. We’ve learned through this experience that we all struggle during challenging times and need support and access to care so we can thrive.

Mental health conditions do not discriminate based on race, color, gender or identity. Anyone can experience the challenges of mental illness regardless of their background. However, background and identity can make access to mental health treatment much more difficult. Bebe Moore Campbell National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month was established in 2008 to start changing this.

Visit the National Alliance on Mental Health to read personal stories.

ETSU Counseling Center

Well-being (noun) the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy.

*Embrace on a Well-Being Journey.*

**Emotional Well-being**—“Emotional well-being involves the awareness, understanding, and acceptance of our feelings,” according to scholars at the University of California, Davis.

**Environmental Well-Being**—Environmental well-being is our relationship with our surroundings.

**Financial Well-Being**—Financial well-being is defined by the ability to manage finances successfully.

**Intellectual Well-Being**—Intellectual well-being is defined by a curiosity to learn and incorporate new experiences to expand our knowledge and skills.

**Occupational Well-Being**—Occupational well-being is defined by exploring and utilizing your strengths and skills to find a career path that promotes enrichment and personal satisfaction.

**Physical Well-Being**—Physical well-being is characterized by taking good care of our bodies by engaging in physical activity, proper nutrition, and good sleep to promote overall health.

**Social Well-Being**—Social Well-Being is characterized by finding our sense of belonging through social connection. Social well-being can aid in resilience, build self-confidence, and foster healthy relationship building and communication skills that permeate into our academic and professional lives.

**Spiritual Well-Being**—Spiritual well-being is characterized by exploring our inner selves to find meaning and purpose in our lives. Spiritual well-being can lead to a sense of harmony within ourselves and the world around us.
Naomi Osaka is a Japanese professional tennis player. She has been ranked No.1 by the Women's Tennis Association and is the first Asian player to hold the top ranking in singles. She is a four-time Grand Slam singles champion. In 2020 she was named a sportsperson of the year for her U.S. Open Champion and advocacy for equality and social justice.

Naomi’s career catapulted her into instant stardom. She uses her platform not only to wow the world with exceptional tennis, but also to fight social inequality.

“I don't feel like I'm being brave. I just feel like I'm doing what I should be doing.”

Mental health has a heightened awareness in women’s tennis as Naomi confessed last year to suffering from depression. She withdrew from the French Open to tend to her mental health. Naomi says “It's OK to not be Ok” and believes that standing up for mental health is “all worth it”. Her intention was to give a critical look at the tennis workplace and ask if things can be done better.
Memorial Day Remembrance

Memorial Day honors the men and women who died while serving in the U.S. military.

Memorial day is an exemplary opportunity to pay tribute, respect, remember, and praise those fallen soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice for the country.

Below are some Memorial Day Activities you may enjoy:

- Donate to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs—Whether you donate time or money, your contribution to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will be greatly appreciated. To see how you can help, visit the VA's website.

- Tune Into the National Memorial Day Concert—Turn on your TV and watch a moving tribute that honors America's servicemen and women from the comfort of your home. This year's event airs Sunday, May 29, at 8:00 p.m. EST on PBS.

- Send a care package—Honor the heroes of the past by sending a care package to an active duty service member. Visit Support Our Troops for more information.

- Pay Respects at a Cemetery—Not everyone can pay their respects at Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day weekend, but there are many national cemeteries across the country where you can place American flags on the resting places of fallen soldiers.

- Other activities: Host a barbecue, watch a parade, try a craft, go on a bike ride, go fishing, play lawn games, decorate your house, listen to patriotic music...just don't forget to pause for a moment and hold space for the significance of the day.

"Our nation owes a debt to its fallen heroes that we can never fully repay."

Barack Obama
44th U.S. President

"Ceremonies are important. But our gratitude has to be more than visits to the troops and once-a-year Memorial Day ceremonies. We honor the dead best by treating the living well."

Jennifer M. Granholm
Secretary, U.S. Department of Energy
4th Annual Equity and Inclusion Conference

Creating a Culture of Belonging: Building Capacity, Partnerships, and Opportunities for Progress

Student Track Sept. 29

SAVE THE DATE

September 27-29, 2022
Hybrid Conference

etsu.edu/equity
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Upcoming Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 2022</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **June 2022** |
| Tuesday | June 14th | Lunch and Learn Series Building and Supporting LGBTQIA+ Pride and Resilience | 12:00-1:00pm | Via Zoom |
| Discussion Lead: Mickey White, Ph. D., NCC, BC-TMH, Assistant Professor Counseling Program |

| **July 2022** |
| Tuesday | July 12th | Lunch and Learn Series Impact of COVID-19 | 12:00-1:00pm | Via Zoom |
| Discussion Lead: Georgita Washington, PhD, RN, MSN, NPD-BC, MACM, Retired Faculty |

| **August 2022** |
| Tuesday | August 2nd | Lunch and Learn Series It's the Conversation for Me: A Conversation that Feeds the Soul | 12:00-1:00pm | Via Zoom |
| Discussion Leads: Dylan Fields, Jaylen Grimes and Jay Guillory |
| Tuesday | August 9th | Lunch and Learn Series Racial Battle Fatigue in Black Male Students | 12:00-1:00pm | Via Zoom |
| Discussion Lead: Sean Hembrick, M.Ed., MFA, Ph.D. Student, Higher Education, Penn State |

| **September 2022** |
| Tuesday-Wednes. | September 27th-28th | 4th Annual Equity and Inclusion Conference Creating a Culture of Belonging: Building Capacity, Partnerships, and Opportunities | TBA | Hybrid Event |
| Thursday | September 29th | 4th Annual Equity and Inclusion Conference Student Track Day | TBA | Hybrid Event |

---

**Office of Equity and Inclusion Lunch and Learn Sessions**

**Did you know** that you have access to over 30 session recordings from past Office of Equity and Inclusion Lunch and Learn sessions. Titles include: Intersectionality: The Many Layers of You and Me, Recognizing and Responding to Microaggressions, and Working with First Generation Students.

To listen to past sessions go to [Learning/Opportunities](#) on the Office of Equity and Inclusion website.
Meet Stephanie Hill Skerlak, an Area Coordinator in Housing and Residence Life.

I believe that the Office of Equity provides us with our foundation for inclusive practices, guides the work that we are doing as individuals and departments, puts into motion our University's mission, and helps ETSU feel like home for students from diverse, and often underrepresented, backgrounds.

The Advisory Council should embody the vision of the Office of Equity and Inclusion, passionately living out the ETSU mission, and creating action through inclusive campus activities and outreach. These are the folks that must be willing to step up and do the hard work and the heart work to make ETSU inclusive, safe, and welcoming.

Diversity represents and recognizes the differences in backgrounds and lived experiences of individuals within a society. I believe that diversity must be intersectional and must encompass acceptance and respect. Through that belief, I encourage people to honor the uniqueness of others through placing a strong value on showing up authentic, vulnerable, and as our whole selves – and allowing space for others to do the same. In my work as an Area Coordinator, I equip and motive the Resident Directors and Resident Advisors to have conversations around respect and inclusion through continual training, peer learning, and modeling. I also have open dialogues with staff concerning the ways we can champion the differences of residents and work with staff on tangible ways to create a community where people feel supported and welcomed in our residence halls.

My approach to dealing with difficult topics surrounding diversity is, first and foremost, to not shy away from having them. I believe that when I show up authentic, vulnerable, and brave, it encourages the folks around me to do the same. I also believe that showing up and welcoming tough conversations every day is a good way to model the behavior that I would like to see from the students and colleagues that surround me. Lastly, I value the idea of calling people in, not out – and I see myself practicing this idea often in the spaces that I show up in, especially as I work to educate the people around me while recognizing that I show up with my own diverse identities that aren’t always easy to see.

For me, most of my tough conversations surrounding diversity are working with students in residential communities. I think it is imperative to set ground rules, reaffirm a commitment to cultivating empathetic responses, listen to understand and not to respond, ensure that all voices are heard, and recognize that progress is hardly ever perfection and growth is sometimes really uncomfortable for folks, especially young adults living in a residence hall. I think once I owned that progress was all I could ask for and that the idea of perfection is just that, it helped me feel more at peace when navigating difficult topics.

I think about the work I do as an Area Coordinator and an Advisor for a student organization, and I also think about the work I do as a human here on staff who comes to work with a diverse set of identities and lived experiences that shape my approach to the work we do here at ETSU.

~ Stephanie Hill Skerlak

Office of Equity and Inclusion
109 Burgin E. Dossett Hall
P.O. Box 70705
Johnson City, TN 37614
P 423-439-4445
F 423-439-4543

Webpage: https://www.etsu.edu/equity/
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/etsuequity/
Instagram and Twitter - etsu_equity

We would like to hear from you.

If you have an announcement, event, accomplishment, etc. you would like to have published in the newsletter send them to Kim Maturo at maturo@etsu.edu.

To add a name to our mailing list, please email Kim Maturo at maturo@etsu.edu.