Supporting Bereaved Students: What Do Campus Communities Do?

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SUPPORTING BEREAVED STUDENTS: WHAT DO CAMPUS COMMUNITIES DO?

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MOTIVATION FOR RESEARCH

- Field Practicum in hospice agency
- Personal experiences of grief and loss
- Opportunity for Undergraduate Research at La Salle University
  - Program that provides students the opportunity to work with professors to conduct research as part of a three credit independent study course.
How Many students are within 1 year of grieving the death of a family member or friend?
- 22%-33% of Students are within 1 year of grieving the death of a family member or friend.

How many students are within 2 years of grieving the death of a family member or friend?
- 35%-48% of students are within 2 years of grieving the death of a family member or friend.
METHODOLOGY

• Applied to La Salle University Undergraduate Research Program
• Developed survey adapted from David Fajgenbaum’s survey
• Completed an application to the Institutional Review Board
• Sent survey to individuals in five (5) administrative roles at 30 colleges with social work programs accredited by CSWE in the state of Pennsylvania
  • Administrators included:
    • Deans of Students
    • Directors of Residential Life
    • Directors of Counseling Centers
    • Social Work Program Directors
    • Campus Ministers
### Respondents
- Of the 140 potential respondents, 40 administrators responded including:
  - 11 Deans of Students
  - 6 Directors of Residential Life
  - 11 Directors of Counseling Centers
  - 4 Social Work Program Directors
  - 6 Directors of Campus Life
  - 2 Other Discipline(s)

### Location and Affiliation
- **Affiliation**
  - 9 from Public Institutions
  - 9 from Private non-sectarian institutions
  - 22 from Private-sectarian
- **Location:**
  - 12 urban campuses
  - 19 suburban campuses
  - 9 rural campuses
MAJOR FINDINGS

- Administrators indicated that issues related to bereavement affect their campus community.
- Little is known about the academic support that is provided to bereaved students.
- The discrepancy between the role of friends and peers in providing support to bereaving students.
TO WHAT DEGREE IS THE STUDENT POPULATION AFFECTED AS PERCEIVED BY ADMINISTRATORS?

Major: 2.5%
Small: 20%
Moderate: 20%
Somewhat: 57.5%
ADMINISTRATORS’ PERCEPTION OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Different ways that grief impact students academic performance according to respondents:

• 70% of Respondent's stated that students experience a drop in GPA.
• 80% of Respondent's stated that students experience negative change in study habits.
• 45% of Respondent's stated that student's desire to take semester off.

Administrator's Awareness of Academic Supports:

• 35% of Respondent's are unaware of services provided to support student's academic needs.
• 10% stated that their campus community did not have any support system established for academic supports.
• When asked in what departments do students most likely seek support only 2.5% responded an academic department.
ROLE OF FRIENDS

Frequency of sharing with friends
- Not very often: 12.5%
- Somewhat often: 42.5%
- Often: 27.5%
- Very often: 12.5%

Frequency of College Counseling Services Used
- Not Very Often: 20%
- Somewhat Often: 47.5%
- Often: 25%
- Very Often: 2.5%
70% of respondents stated that one of the issues that separates college bereavement from other bereavement is that peers and friends don’t know what to say or how to help.

80% of respondents stated that students tend to withdraw from social interactions.

45% say they notice an increase in conflict with peers.

52.5% of respondents stated that there was no formal grief counseling training for students.

10% of respondents stated that their college or university offered peer counseling services.
IMPLICATIONS

• Bereavement impacts college campuses
• Necessity for collaboration between student life and academic services.
• More training for friends and peers
• Need for further research into students’ perspective of grief and loss programs compared to administrators’ perspective.
REFERENCES


• Wrenn, R. L. (2002). Bereavement Counseling at the University Level. *ERIC Digest*.