

# Enhancing Social Networks at Worcester Polytechnic Institute

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## **WPI Specific Data**

- 44% reported feeling so depressed over the past year that they have not been able to function (approximately 1702 students)
- 7.6% have seriously contemplated suicide over the past year (289 students)
- 1.7% have made a suicide attempt (65 students)

2004 WPI "The Health Survey"

## **Enhancing a network of Support**

- Who are the individuals and groups within campus communities who are most influential within a network of student support?
- What responsibilities and roles might counseling centers assume to enhance the network of support?

## **WPI Student Support Network (SSN)**

- Identifying and selecting student participants
  - E-mail to faculty and staff
  - General advertising/programming
- Training SSN participants (6 week training)
  - Knowledge
  - Skills
  - Perspectives/Stigma reduction
  - Connection

## **SSN Perspectives**

- De-stigmatizing view of mental health
  - Normalization of struggles
  - Functional vs. Diagnostic descriptions
  - “It’s not us and them...it’s us and us”
- Enhancing Connection
  - Networking within support system
  - Helping the helpers

## **Evaluating SSN Outcomes**

(based on 104 student participants)

- Pre/post SIRI II results indicate significantly better crisis responding skills
- Students demonstrated significant improvement in the following areas:
  - Recognizing warning signs for suicide
  - Making appropriate referrals for support
  - Convincing someone to get help
  - Discussing suicide with others
- Fourfold increase in peer referrals to SDCC

## Student Participant Perspectives

- “The series opened doors to talking about issues generally classified as taboo. The easy-going, relaxed atmosphere made it very comfortable to talk and learn.”
- “It was worthwhile because I got to know the SDCC staff and learn of the resources available for troubled students.”
- “I feel it helped me realize how to help others cope with their problems and also how to better cope with my own. Most importantly, I feel like I could actually help someone talk about and solve their issues.”
- “It was worthwhile because even if I don’t end up using this in college, it is something that I can use for the rest of my life.”

## Contact Information

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