May 2016

Minding Your Health

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“The spa music in the waiting room was a little intense,” says freshman Sean McGee as he recalls the first time he went to the counseling services. “I was shaky my first time going in. There was no ‘Oh yeah!’ excitement.”

McGee first went to the counseling services at the beginning of the fall semester this school year. He says he decided to go when he realized he was depressed.

“I was sleeping a lot — not because I was tired, I was emotionally exhausted. I slept 13 hours a night and school became a second priority,” he explains.

Upon arriving at the center, just like any student who goes to the center in hopes of getting help, McGee had to fill out four pages of questions on several different topics, ranging from eating habits to anger levels and depression. A one-on-one “diagnostic meeting” followed, which McGee says was
recorded just as any meeting a student has with a counselor at the center is.

“I was nervous [the counselor] was going to tell me I didn’t need to be there. I had a fear of being lectured, but she was very welcoming. She calmly approached everything with, ‘How does that make you feel?’”

McGee says the first session was eye-opening for him.

“I walked in thinking I had no serious problems, but I was looking for a diagnosis. At first they were hesitant to do that and give a label, but I was looking for one.”

The diagnostic session brought to light the problems McGee had been facing. Although the counselor never outright gave him a diagnostic title, which was a bit irritating to McGee, he personally came to the conclusion that he had depression and an eating disorder after starting the session.

After the one-on-one diagnostic session, the counselor created an eight-week plan, scheduling to meet for a session every Monday. That is the usual time span someone continues one-on-one counseling sessions at the center. During the sessions, he was taught different coping mechanisms and exercises to learn how to deal with his issues in a healthier way. McGee says that once the eight weeks were up, it was recommended he see someone else, but he decided not to follow up because he didn’t want to relive the experience of bringing up unpleasant things with someone new.

Looking back on his experience with the mental health services, he says there were a lot of heavy emotions, but it was a safe environment. During the time he went through counseling there was a lot of self-realization and self-awareness.

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“She saw right through my bullshit,” he says, referring to his counselor. “They [the people working at the help center] knew who they were dealing with,” McGee says recalling seeing an LGBTQ publication in the waiting room.

McGee believes that the center may not be the best option for people who are very suicidal because of the time it may take to receive help. If you are in crucial need for immediate attention, a faster form of help such as 911 may be necessary. However, in his opinion, “The center is good for racial and social minorities and LGBTQ issues, as well as eating disorders and depression.”

Sophomore Katie Jones* has the same to say of her experience so far with the counseling center, which is still in-progress.

Jones says that in the past she’s had feelings of self-doubt with her ability to maintain a heavy workload and that had an impact on her emotions, but with the beginning of this year came a new set of problems.

“This year, my friend and I went through a really rough time...we weren’t helping each other move forward. I just couldn’t get out of the slump I was in,” says Jones about what motivated her to seek help. “I decided to go, and I wish I would have gone earlier.”

Jones explained that once she began her counseling sessions at the beginning of this semester, she scheduled a six-week plan. She had no shortage of good things to say about the counselor she was placed with.

“She was awesome right off the bat, and I think that’s pretty rare to go in and connect with a counselor, but she just spoke about things in a way that was really healing immediately,” she recalls. “The first session was really good. I just kind of said, ‘So here’s all the word vomit about my life, and here are the places I see problems.’”

Taking the first step and setting up a session is one of the most difficult parts of the process. Not only because it takes a lot of courage to enter the center for help, but also because one criticism Jones had about the counseling center was the inconvenient hours they invited walk-in appointments. She said that classes often intervene with those hours.

According to Jones, the six weeks she spent in the one-on-one counseling were good and the topics they discussed about feelings of shame and guilt were helpful. After that period of time she felt stronger because of the “coping tools” she had developed to deal with her moments of emotional instability.

Once those individual counseling sessions came to an end, her counselor recommended she join group therapy at the center. She is now participating in that, and really enjoys it. However, it is a bit difficult on her part to be sure to respectfully share the space with others — that is the main difference between group therapy and one-on-one. Outside of therapy, Jones practices her mindfulness with the tools and techniques she has learned. She predicts that the sessions will help her to be successful in her endeavor to gain a healthy mental state.

Like McGee, she advises that, “If you think you need to go, go!”