

## **2021 HONORS IN ACTION PROJECT (2600 words total; 325 words in questions)**

1. Provide a brief abstract or summary of your Honors in Action project including the following components: academic research into and analysis of sources related to the Honors Study Topic, action that addresses a need in your community that was discovered through your research and analysis into the Society's current Honors Study Topic, and the impact of your project. *(NOTE: Recommended word count for the abstract is no more than 300 words.)*

We began our project by reviewing the Honors Study Topic, "To the Seventh Generation: Inheritance and Legacy." We explored several themes, conducted preliminary research, and shared our findings in weekly virtual meetings. Mental health during the pandemic overwhelmingly emerged as our favored topic. We were empowered by the World Health Organization's vision (WHO, 2020) that "all people achieve the highest standard of mental health and well-being." This led us to explore global, national, state, and local mental health treatment and access to resources. We attended an online workshop with Horry-Georgetown Technical College's (HGTC) research librarian and completed Research Edge to learn how to conduct academic research. We were concerned by the differences in ways countries manage mental health treatment, particularly the percentages of the gross domestic products (GDP) being used toward affordable access (WHO, 2020). National reports indicated nearly 65% of respondents stated lack of awareness of resources and cost as barriers to treatment (Reinert, 2019). We surveyed HGTC students and nearly 45% stated the same reasons for not getting help. Committee members reviewed resources available to students at our college. We found one counselor serves over 6,000 students, and online resources were inadequate and difficult to locate. We set our goal to improve our college's mental health culture by improving access and advocating for additional mental health positions. Our action component consisted of identifying collaborators, requesting funding, creating and sharing a wellness bulletin, and re-designing the college website. We were fortunate to receive a Mellon Foundation grant and were thrilled to use the money to save a student's life who was experiencing a horribly abusive situation. Our legacy is knowing our project will help the seventh generation of HGTC students improve their mental health and well-being.

2. What theme in the current Honors Program Guide did your chapter focus on?

Theme 2 – Natural and Constructed Environments

## **2021 HONORS IN ACTION PROJECT (2600 words total; 325 words in questions)**

3. Summarize your research objectives. In other words, what did your chapter set out to accomplish in terms of its research? (See Research Objectives Rubric in the HiA Rubrics for more detail)

During officer training, everyone reviewed the Honors Study Guide and chose their favorite theme for further research. During subsequent meetings, we shared our discoveries and realized the most captivating research centered on mental health within the context of Covid-19. This led us to research theme two, Natural and Constructed Environments. After thorough collaboration, we developed our research question and objectives:

How has the natural environment of Covid-19 impacted our constructed understanding of mental health and our ability to achieve mental wellness?

- Attend virtual database training with HGTC research librarian
- Complete Research Edge
- Review at least 25 sources, including global perspectives
- Hold weekly online committee meetings to review research and plan our action
- Identify 8 academic sources
- Research mental health resource availability by contacting area providers
- Explore the parameters contributing to our understanding of mental health

4. Describe your academic research into the Honors Study Topic, your research question(s), your analysis of your research findings, and your research conclusions.

The natural environment of Covid-19 and subsequent constructed environment of social isolation impacted our mental and physical health in ways we did not anticipate. Our psychology professor's presentation taught us humans are not biologically wired for chronic long-term stress management, causing increased anxiety, depression, and other physical and emotional health problems. This led us to research how the pandemic impacted our understanding of mental health and our ability to achieve mental wellness.

We discovered global mental health treatment differences by examining New Zealand, Canada, Germany, Italy, China, France, and India. We were stunned some countries have few mental health resources, and others offered no payment assistance even if they had resources. For instance, mental health

## **2021 HONORS IN ACTION PROJECT (2600 words total; 325 words in questions)**

spending per GDP in Germany is 15% and France is 11.27%, compared to the United States (US), which is less than .05%. Through WHO (2020) reports, we began to see mental health as a serious issue. South Carolina ranked 44<sup>th</sup> in the US according to the Mental Health in America report, indicating “a higher prevalence of mental illness and lower rates of access to care” (Reinert, 2019). Our research indicated US college students were a vulnerable group affected by the pandemic. According to the American College Health Association (2020), nearly 50% of students reported anxiety and depression diagnoses. Zhai’s 2020 article indicated these diagnoses in college students arose from restrictions brought on by the pandemic, such as social isolation, changes in class delivery methods, college closures, and general fears about the virus. We were surprised to find over 65% of respondents stated cost and lack of awareness of services were the primary reasons for not seeking treatment (Reinert, 2019). The Sandmire 2016 study found arts participation decreased stress and increased cardiovascular function. Several studies concluded mindfulness-based activities, including yoga and coloring, reduced college students’ stress and anxiety.

Our committee contacted area mental health providers and found nine serving two counties. We investigated local school districts and found they have sufficient student mental health resources. Other technical colleges and universities had a wide array of resources, including online appointment scheduling and easy-access icons for help. We examined our college and were shocked to discover only one full-time counselor serves over 6,000 students. In 2019 alone, 963 students, or over 16% of our enrollment, requested and received services. Online resources were limited and difficult to locate on our website.

We analyzed our research and concluded the pandemic drastically increased the overall need for mental health services, especially for college students. Our college lacked adequate resources to address students’ mental health needs. We were determined to leave a legacy of improved mental health and mindfulness resources at our college.

5. List the 8 academic/expert sources that were most enlightening regarding multiple perspectives of the Honors Study Topic theme you selected. Briefly explain why these were the most important sources and what you learned from each of them as you researched your theme. (NOTE: Please use full, formal APA citations for your entry.)

## **2021 HONORS IN ACTION PROJECT (2600 words total; 325 words in questions)**

American College Health Association. (2020). *American College Health Association-national college health assessment III: Reference group executive summary spring 2020*.

[https://www.acha.org/documents/ncha/NCHA-III\\_Spring\\_2020\\_Reference\\_Group\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](https://www.acha.org/documents/ncha/NCHA-III_Spring_2020_Reference_Group_Executive_Summary.pdf)

This assessment reports data on students' habits and behaviors on the most prevalent health topics, and it provides a vast spectrum of information on the health of the nation's 20 million college students. The data surprised us and led us to investigate the mental health of our fellow students.

Daniels, D., & Ritter, D. (2018). How health care policy and laws have impacted mental health delivery. *Southern Law Journal*, 28(2), 229–245.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1016%2Fj.amepre.2015.01.022>

This article described multiple pieces of US legislation and their effect on mental health delivery and access throughout the years. It indicated the deinstitutionalization of mental health facilities is a significant consequence of legislation. This article led us to explore local mental health resources.

Kakunje, A., Mithur, R., & Kishor, M. (2020). Emotional well-being, mental health awareness, and prevention of suicide: Covid-19 pandemic and digital psychiatry. *Archives of Medicine and Health Sciences*, 8(1),

147. <https://www.amhsjournal.org/text.asp?2020/8/1/147/287374>

The article provided an overview of how COVID-19 negatively affected the mental well-being of the world's population. Practicing self-care and fostering interpersonal relationships can help maintain mental wellness. This directed our research towards the importance of self-care and led us to promote self-care resources to students.

Levin E. M., Krafft J., & Levin C. (2018). Does self-help increase rates of help seeking for student mental health problems by minimizing stigma as a barrier? *Journal of American College Health*, 66(4), 302-309.

[https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/evidence/special\\_initiative\\_2019\\_2023/en/](https://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/special_initiative_2019_2023/en/)

This article indicated self-help delivered online or through books increases the reach and impact of mental health services among college students. Self-help is cost

## 2021 HONORS IN ACTION PROJECT (2600 words total; 325 words in questions)

effective, convenient, and reduces burdens on counseling centers and other university services. This led us to explore online self-help resources.

Reinert, M., Nguyen, T., & Fritze, D. (2019). *The state of mental health in America: 2020*. Mental Health America.

<https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/State%20of%20Mental%20Health%20in%20America%20-%202020.pdf>

This annual report provided state rankings for mental health categories such as mental illness prevalence rates, access to mental health care, and unmet mental health service needs rates. This report led us to review mental health services in our state and community.

Sandmire, D. A., Rankin, N. E., Gorham, S. R., Eggleston, D. T., French, C. A., Lodge, E. E., Kuns, G. C., & Grimm, D. R. (2016). Psychological and autonomic effects of art making in college-aged students. *Anxiety, Stress & Coping*, 29(5), 561–569.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2015.1076798>

College students participated in a 2015 study measuring the physical and psychological effects of 30 minutes of arts activities. It concluded art participation is useful in reducing stress and improves cardiovascular functioning. We used this source to identify mental wellness resources for students.

World Health Organization. (2020). *WHO special initiative for mental health (2019-2023): Universal health coverage for mental health*.

[https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/evidence/special\\_initiative\\_2019\\_2023/en/](https://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/special_initiative_2019_2023/en/)

This report provided worldwide data on mental health issues and service availability. It calls for increased investment for mental health awareness and increased access to quality mental health services. This report led us to apply for a Mellon Foundation mini-grant, which we received.

Zhai, Y., & Du, X. (2020). Addressing collegiate mental health amid COVID-19 pandemic. *Psychiatry Research*, 288, 113003.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113003>

This article provides recommendations to higher education institutions and health professionals to address collegiate mental health needs and challenges posed by COVID-19. We used it to advocate for mental health awareness and website changes at HGTC.

## **2021 HONORS IN ACTION PROJECT (2600 words total; 325 words in questions)**

6. Summarize your project action and collaboration objectives. In other words, what did your chapter set out to accomplish in terms of its collaborations and action?

Our ultimate objective was to leave a legacy at HGTC by increasing mental health resources and providing easier access to them.

To accomplish this, we developed the following action objectives, being mindful of restrictions due to the pandemic:

- Assess student mental health resource awareness through an electronic survey
- Apply for a Mellon Grant
- Create a mental health bulletin to empower students to use online mindfulness resources
- Advocate for additional mental health professionals at HGTC

We accomplished our action objectives through collaborating with:

- A psychology professor to learn about the pandemic's impact on mental health
- HGTC Foundation to disburse Mellon Grant funds
- HGTC Director of Student Development to clarify how and why students obtain services
- HGTC Web Services Coordinator to redesign the counseling services portion of the college website

7. Describe the service or "action" components of this Honors in Action project that were inspired by and directly connected to your Honors Study Topic research. (Action can also include promoting awareness and advocacy.) Be sure to include information about the people and/or groups with whom you collaborated, why you chose these collaborators, and the impact they had on the outcomes of the project.

Our research led us to consult a local psychology professor to understand the impact of mental health conditions and treatment on the brain and to explain the effects of stress during a pandemic. Her virtual presentation changed the way we understood what mental wellness means and led us to explore mindfulness activities. We subsequently created the attached Mental Health Awareness and Mindfulness bulletin, which was distributed electronically to all students via faculty, college email, and college-wide announcements.

## **2021 HONORS IN ACTION PROJECT (2600 words total; 325 words in questions)**

Through our research, we found 65% of US students identified cost and lack of awareness of mental health services as treatment barriers. We partnered with HGTC's Director of Student Development to understand how and why students seek mental health services, clarify the extent of student need, and redesign the college website to include mental health resources. We decided to apply for a Mellon Foundation grant to help students who needed mental health services the college cannot provide. When we discussed with her how to disburse the grant funds, the director suggested working with HGTC's Foundation. Once we were awarded the funds, we worked with them as a fiscal agent.

We updated the mental health portion of the HGTC Community Resources Guide by calling area providers to verify their services and costs. We created and conducted an electronic student survey on awareness and use of HGTC's mental health services. Because almost 45% of HGTC students reported being unaware of services, we proposed changing the college website by adding a quick link, the updated community mental health resources guide, and dedicated mental health resource pages.

HiA team members created a PowerPoint presentation for HGTC's Executive Leadership Team, which ultimately makes decisions for the college. During our virtual presentation, we described our research findings, survey results, proposed website changes, shared our mental health bulletin, and advocated for improved mental health services and an additional counselor at HGTC.

We submitted a draft design proposal for our website including new mindfulness and mental health resources. The Web Services Coordinator reviewed our proposal and consulted with the marketing department. In a virtual meeting and through several email exchanges, we worked with him to identify sources, provide logos, and verify links. Our proposal was approved and implemented.

Through our actions and collaborations, we met our ultimate objective to leave a legacy at HGTC by increasing college mental health resources and providing easier access to them.

8. What are the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of your project? What impact did your project have on the problem addressed and on opportunities for chapter members and others to grow as scholars and leaders?

We developed an electronic student survey in Google forms to assess the need for and access to HGTC mental health services. To conduct our survey, 21 out of 38 professors

## **2021 HONORS IN ACTION PROJECT (2600 words total; 325 words in questions)**

in nine programs shared it with over 2,500 students. We received 310 survey responses (see attached), a response rate greater than 10%. We were alarmed nearly 45% of respondents were unaware of services nor how to access them. Their comments included:

- “I did not know about counseling services at HGTC. It would be a huge help for a work, life, school balance.”
- “I didn't know we have counseling.”
- “I think more people would use the counseling services if it were advertised more often.”

Our research identified cost as a barrier to treatment. To address this, we applied for and received a \$1,000 Mellon Foundation grant. We collaborated with HGTC's Foundation to administer the funds to protect student privacy. We asked our Director of Student Development to identify students who needed financial assistance with mental health care. A few weeks later we received an email from her describing a student in desperate need of shelter and protection from abuse. She asked if all the money could be used to help this student, and we readily approved. Her follow-up email stated:

- “The student just left my office - she was absolutely in tears because she could not believe the help she received from the college and from Phi Theta Kappa. The generous support you and the students made possible will allow her to stay in school, receive some additional mental health assistance with one of our community partners, and have food and shelter as we try to figure out the other things we need to put in place for her physical safety and emotional wellbeing. You have surely changed this student's life forever!”

Although it was painful to know a student faced homelessness and abuse, we were humbled and grateful to be able to help.

HGTC administrators said we had “great suggestions,” and the Executive Leadership Team endorsed our recommendations for changes to the website and adding a full-time counselor. Due to COVID-19, however, the college was under a hiring freeze.

To complete our final action objective, we collaborated with our Web Services Coordinator. Our website proposal included five pages: Counseling Services homepage, Community Resources, Crisis/911, Self-Help, and Counseling. We proposed three hotlines for the Crisis/911 page, eleven sources on the Self-Help page, and nine community resources with logos. The Web Services Coordinator worked with



## **2021 HONORS IN ACTION PROJECT (2600 words total; 325 words in questions)**

us to finalize the design in compliance with HGTC's website standards (see attached screenshot).

We learned how to conduct academic research by completing Research Edge and attending the research librarian workshop. We acquired new software skills, learned Canva, and created attractive PowerPoint slides. Our confidence increased by rehearsing our presentation multiple times, resulting in a professional and cohesive effort. Our teamwork skills improved as we listened to each other, learned to be flexible, and collaborated on changes. We appreciated one another's strengths, such as creativity and organization, and capitalized on them. While working virtually was a challenge, we discovered benefits. We could have frequent meetings with increased participation. Sharing and revising documents in virtual meetings simultaneously using Google Docs helped improve our writing skills.

We became aware of the extreme need for mental health care at our college and the serious issues brought to college counselors, such as schizophrenia and domestic violence. We grew as scholar-servant-leaders as we felt empowered knowing we changed a fellow student's life and made access to self-help easier for other students and their families through our website changes and wellness bulletin. By positively affecting our constructed environment of mental health access for students during the natural environment of Covid-19, we created our legacy for future HGTC students.