

# SCI 3900/HONOR 3990-

## Being Human in STEM

### Spring 2024 Student Project

# Let's express our stress!

## Mental Health in STEM:

Pursuing an education in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) is not for the faint of heart. STEM is a very challenging discipline; so challenging that almost half of all undergraduate students who begin as STEM majors won't graduate\*. Years of being burdened with demanding classes, endless assignments and high expectations lead to disproportionately high rates of overwhelming stress among STEM students. The high standard that STEM students are held to often prevents them from seeking appropriate mental health resources.

## Identified Need:

- Students across the nation deal with mental health struggles, especially STEM students.
- We noticed that we had similar concerns and experiences surrounding mental health in STEM, but we also realized that we struggled to talk about it with each other.

## What We Did:

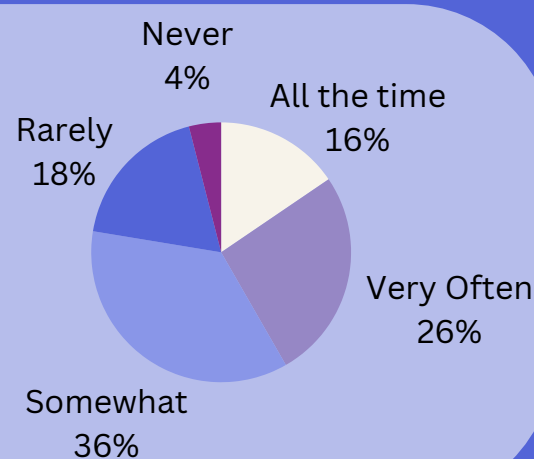
In an effort to shift the culture surrounding mental health on campus, our team hosted events that promoted dialogue amongst STEM students about mental health.

- "Just Dance It Out"- CSC Room 025, March 26th, 2024
  - Featured test anxiety strategies and the opportunity for students to dance out their stress.
- "Pizza and Personal Health"- CSC Room 108, April 11th, 2024
  - Featured free pizza and a space for students to sit down with each other and participate in a guided discussion about their mental health.
  - Featured a survey aimed at assessing the mental health climate for STEM students.

## The Mental Health Climate in STEM at the U:

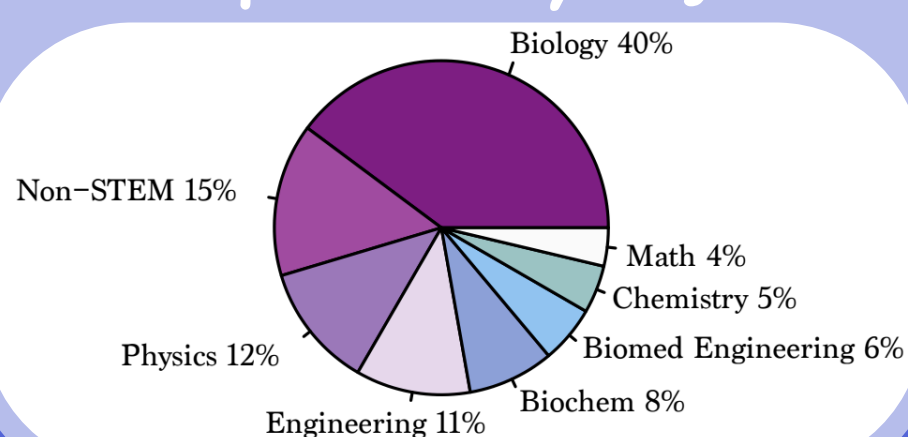
**103**  
students  
responded to  
our survey

How often were students concerned about their mental health during the 2023-24 academic year?



Only 17% of students who reported being concerned about their mental health seek resources on campus.

### Respondents by Major



8/10 survey respondents answered "Yes" to the question "Do you think there is a need for more opportunities for dialogue surrounding mental health among peers?"

\*Daker, R.J., Gattas, S.U., Sokolowski, H.M. et al. First-year students' math anxiety predicts STEM avoidance and underperformance throughout university, independently of math ability. npj Sci. Learn. 6, 17 (2021).

# So, what now?

## Action Items for Continued Improvement

To demonstrate that there is a clear need for more support, we have included quotes from the survey responses.

### Decompression Spaces

"...more areas available for students to simply decompress..."

The College of Science and the College of Engineering each need to have at least one centrally located room that is available for students to decompress without the expectation of doing work. This would give students a designated space to prioritize their mental health.

### There's Always More to Learn!

"...get people more comfortable with [mental health] discussion in a safe environment would be extremely healthy..."

Incorporate mental health education and resources directly into STEM courses. This can include dedicating class time to discuss stress management techniques, embedding mindfulness exercises into lectures, or providing resources for seeking help within course materials.

### Mental Health Focused Events

"...many people have negative mental health due to responsibilities like work and school and therefore will feel like not much can be done."

"...it's easier to talk about mental health in smaller groups."

Organize regular workshops specifically tailored to address the unique stressors and challenges faced by STEM students. These workshops could cover topics such as imposter syndrome, time management, and coping strategies for academic pressure. Additionally, create designated spaces like support groups where students can share their experiences and seek peer support.

### Simplify Counseling Center Access

"It feels lonely and sometimes impossible to try to work through..."

Students are disconnected from the mental health professionals on campus. There are extremely long wait times and a lack of available mental health professionals, making it difficult for students to establish care. Counseling services on campus need to be expanded to ensure that every student seeking support can access it in a timely manner.