

# **Decisions, Decisions: Helping Students with Psychiatric Conditions Navigate Disclosure in the Academic Environment**

**Brittany Stone, MS, CRC**

**Amy Banko, MS, CPRP**

**Rutgers, the State University of NJ**

**School of Health Professions**

**Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation & Counseling Professions**

We ask you to join us in creating a culture that reflects...

Access and Inclusion  
and  
Civility and Respect

...consistent with the AHEAD Statement of Civility during  
our conference and in all aspects of our organization.

## But first...

In 1 or 2 words, what barriers do students cite to disclosing their mental health condition on campus?

text [AMYBANKO830](#) to [22333](#) to join the poll

## Session Objectives:

1. Review special considerations related to disclosing a mental health condition in the academic environment.
2. Increase understanding of the complexities of managing personal information in the academic environment.
3. Develop ability to assist students with psychiatric conditions in creating an intentional disclosure plan for classmates, staff, and faculty by using the *Disclosure Decisions: Disclosing Your Mental Health Condition in Higher Education* guide

# **Mental Health in Higher Ed**

**The Growing Need for Support**

## **“A UNIQUE CLUSTERING OF OBSTACLES”**

- Lower satisfaction with academic experience
- Lower GPA
- Lower rate of return after drop out or LOA
- Lower graduation rate



Image of a steep, snow covered mountain with clouds at the summit.

# Complexities of Disclosure in Higher Ed

# Disclosure Dilemma

Contemplating Disclosure of a mental health condition is related to factors such as:

- Need
- Accessibility Services
- Documentation
- Self efficacy/ Identity
- Stigma

Thompson- Ebanks et al., 2018



# Disability Disclosure Dilemma: The Stress of Stigma

- Stigma
- Discrimination



A black and white image of a hand with the phrase stop stigma on it.

# Students' Concerns When Interacting with Accessibility Services

- Fear of disclosure
- Lack of knowledge
- Stigma
  - Professors
  - Peers
- AS staff perceptions

Collins et al., 2012

# Review of Student's Experience After Disclosure

Key finding regarding student's concerns after disclosure:

- the student's perception of the experience
- the reported response of faculty or peers

Salzer et al., 2008

# **Factors Attributed to Academic Success...**

## **DISCLOSURE PLANNING & SUPPORT!**

Biebel et al., 2018

# **Disclosure and Mental Health Conditions in the Postsecondary Academic Setting**

# Types of Disclosure

- Third Party Disclosure
- Incremental Disclosure
- Entrapment
- Preparation & Rehearsal

Venitis, Chernichky-Karcher & Gettings, 2018

# Disclosure Efficacy

Perceptions of one's ability to share specific information with an identified individual for a desired outcomes

Venitis, Chernichky-Karcher & Gettings, 2018

# Disclosure Efficacy & Disclosure Strategy

- Mode of Disclosure
- Context of Disclosure
- Content of Disclosure

Venitis, Chernichky-Karcher & Gettings, 2018





**Do you currently have a formal disclosure preparation process for students?**

Yes

**A**

No

**B**

Text your response, A for YES or B for NO to [22333](https://text.22333.com)

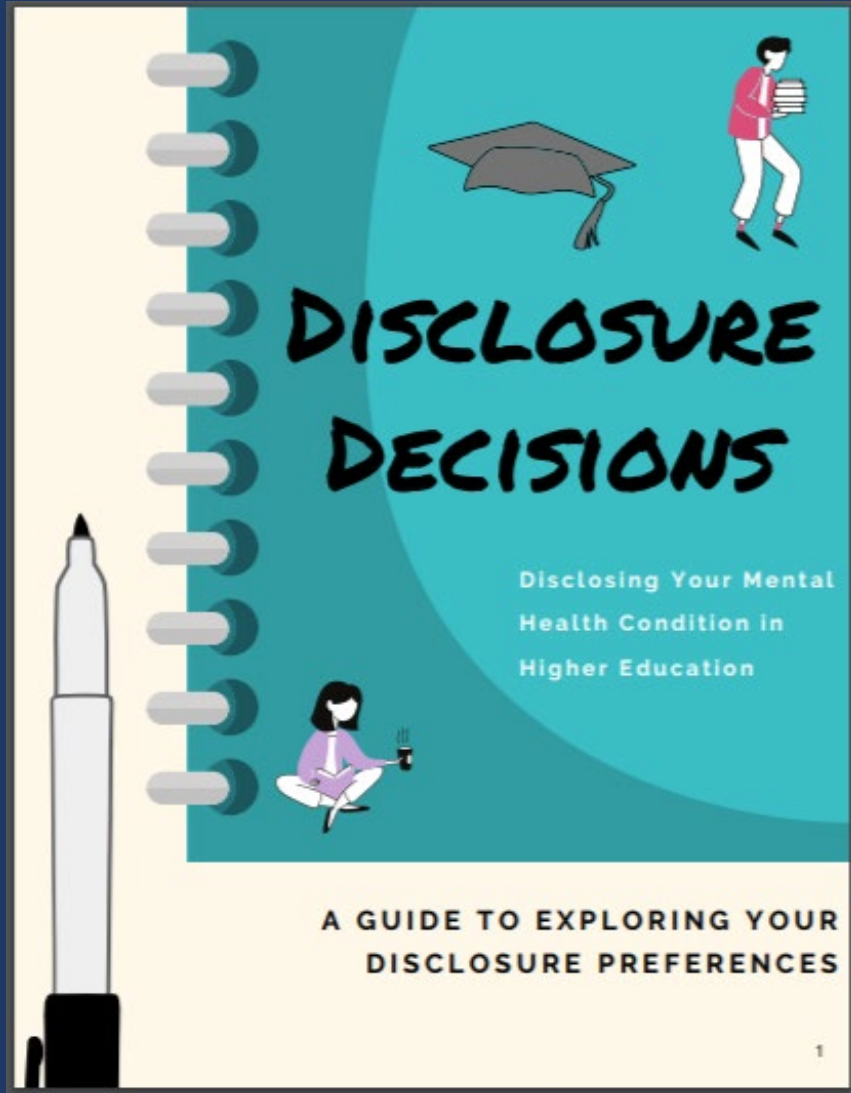
# **A Guide To Exploring Disclosure**

**Disclosure Decisions: Disclosing Your Mental Health  
Condition in Higher Education**



# Equity & Excellence Access in Higher Education

A Virtual Event  
July 6-24, 2020




- Support exploration of disclosure
- Can be utilized with new or existing students
- Used to develop initial disclosure preferences
- Can revisit the workbook for each semester to guide future discussions

Image of Disclosure Decisions workbook cover, includes a graduation cap, pen, a person in a meditative position, & a person carrying a stack of books

# What's In The Guide:

- Disclosing MHCs in the Post Secondary Setting
- Defining Your Disclosure Preferences
- Reasons for Disclosure: Why or Why Not?
- Crafting Your Narrative
- Resources

Image of the table of contents from the guide



CONTENTS	
04	<b>Disclosing Mental Health Conditions in the Postsecondary Setting</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Americans with Disabilities Act (5)</li><li>• The Role of Disclosure In Accessing Your ADA Rights (6)</li></ul>
08	<b>Defining Your Disclosure Preferences</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Past Experiences with Disclosure (8)</li><li>• Identifying Your Strengths and Needs (11)</li><li>• Who Am I Going To Tell? (17)</li></ul>
18	<b>Reasons for Disclosure: Why or Why Not?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decisional Balance (18)</li><li>• Decisional Balance Summary (19)</li><li>• Readiness Ruler Exercise (20)</li><li>• Readiness Ruler Summary (22)</li></ul>
23	<b>Crafting Your Narrative</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What to Disclose and How to Say It? (23)</li><li>• Your Approach: Deciding When, Where, &amp; How (26)</li><li>• Crafting Your Script (29)</li><li>• Considering the Reactions of Others (31)</li><li>• Reviewing Your Disclosure Conversation (32)</li></ul>
34	<b>Resources</b>

# Defining Your Preferences

# Past Experiences with Disclosure



Blurred image looing through a car windshield on a tree lined road with a clear image of a review mirror and the reflection of the tree lined road in that mirror

# Who Am I Going To Tell?

Consider the following questions when deciding who to disclose to. These questions will inform your decision making process and scripts.

- Is this person going to support me in some way?
- Could there be drawbacks to this disclosure?
- Am I prepared for their reaction to my disclosure?
- Is this person able to provide me with accommodations?
- Is this disclosure essential to our relationship?
- What is the culture of the environment?

# Identifying Your Strengths & Needs

When considering disclosure it helps to consider your skills and strengths as well as needs related to your mental health condition within the context of a particular situation or environment. Being able to articulate this information will better prepare you for these conversations if you decide disclosure is right for you. If you decide it's not the right decision at this time, you can use this information to leverage your strengths and resources in order to meet your needs.



# Identifying Your Strengths and Needs, Classroom Setting:

What are my skills & strengths as they relate to this situation?

I'm a really interested in this subject and eager to learn. I love hands on experiences and projects.

In what way(s) does my condition affect me in this situation?

In lectures, my attention can wander. I like multimedia and have been more successful in classes where professors vary their approach and don't just talk at the class. I might need to compare notes with a classmate in case there's something I miss. Not sure what I'd do if I don't know someone in class to ask.

# Identifying Your Strengths and Needs, Social Setting:

## What are my skills & strengths as they relate to this situation?

I am friendly with everyone but I only have a few good friends that I am a truly open with. I recently became close with a classmate who is also a political science major. I frequently chat with this friend about things we enjoy like music, volunteering, yoga, and the books we are both read. We have a lot in common and really enjoy hanging out, we have even started to attend a political science club together. She trusted me enough to share a family issue she is having, and I think I can trust her as well with sharing things about my mental health condition.

## In what way(s) does my condition affect me in this situation?

I have had to lie to my friend about “getting sick” for our midterms when I used my accommodation of a quiet testing room. I also had to lie when I take breaks during class. I also have anxiety about how my friend will respond if I tell her, I am fearful that she won’t want to hangout anymore.

# Reasons For Disclosure

**Exploring the Why or Why Not**

# Decisional Balance

- Used to explore simultaneously the person's own arguments for and against a change
- It is important that these arguments come from the student

Image of a table with the headings Your Options, Benefits, and Drawbacks across the top and Staying the Same and Making a Change on the left side.

Your Options	Benefits	Drawbacks
<b>Staying the Same:</b> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>		
<b>Making a Change:</b> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>		

Adapted from Miller & Rollnick, (2013).

# Decisional Balance: Classroom Setting

Your Options	Benefits	Drawbacks
Staying the Same: Not disclosing to my condition to my professor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- I maintain the relationship we have</li><li>- I don't have to have an awkward convo</li><li>- I don't have to worry my prof will tell others in the department</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- My prof might misinterpret my behavior &amp; think I don't care</li><li>- I might not get the support I need</li><li>- My grades might go down</li></ul>
Making a Change: Disclosing my condition to my professor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- More understanding and better communication</li><li>- I don't have to feel like I'm hiding something</li><li>- My prof will see MHC isn't a barrier</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- My prof might think I'm not capable of working in the field or treat me differently</li><li>- My prof might think I'm making up excuses</li><li>- I will be hurt and embarrassed if it doesn't go well</li></ul>

# Decisional Balance: Social Setting

Your Options	Benefits	Drawbacks
Do not disclose to my friend and classmate that I have a mental health condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Our relationship remains as is</li> <li>- She doesn't view me as ill</li> <li>- My health information stays private</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I must lie about when I take exams for class</li> <li>- I have to lie on days I'm not feeling well</li> <li>- My friend doesn't know something major about me</li> <li>- I feel bad for hiding this</li> <li>- She doesn't know the real me</li> </ul>
Disclose to my friend and classmate that I have a mental health condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- My friend can know more about me</li> <li>- I won't have to lie about my testing accommodations</li> <li>- I can go to my friend for support</li> <li>- I don't want to keep a friend who doesn't understand mental health issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- She might see me differently</li> <li>- It could impact our relationship</li> <li>- She might share it with someone else</li> </ul>

# Readiness Ruler: Classroom Setting

## IMPORTANCE RULER

"On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being not important to 10 being very important, how **IMPORTANT** is it for you to disclose right now?"

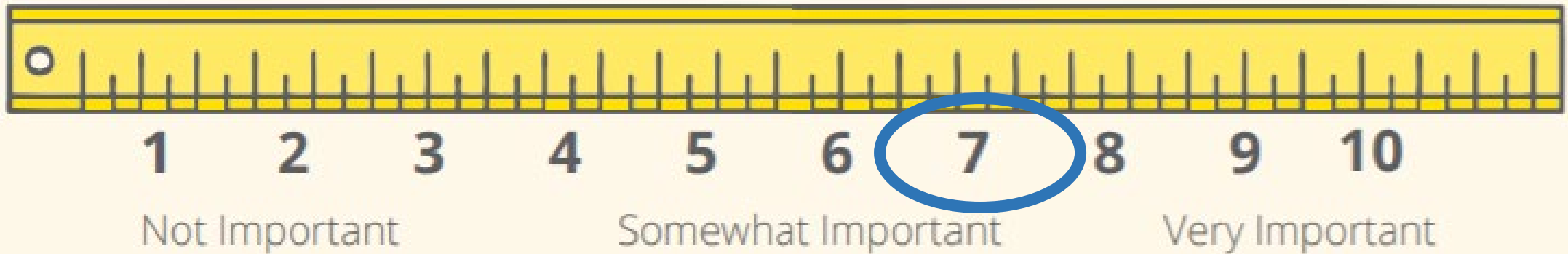


Image of a ruler numbered 1 through 10, with 1 being not important and 10 being very important. Number 7 is circled.

# Importance Ruler: Classroom Setting

- I am at a 7 for importance to disclose. I am not at a 6 (one number lower) because: I've realized my needs aren't getting met and my grades are suffering.
- For me to go from my current number 7 to an 8 (one number higher), I would need: To know what accommodations are available to me and how I'm protected from discrimination.



# Readiness Ruler: Classroom Setting

## CONFIDENCE RULER

"On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being not confident to 10 being very confident, how **CONFIDENT** would you say you are that if you decided to disclose you could do it?"

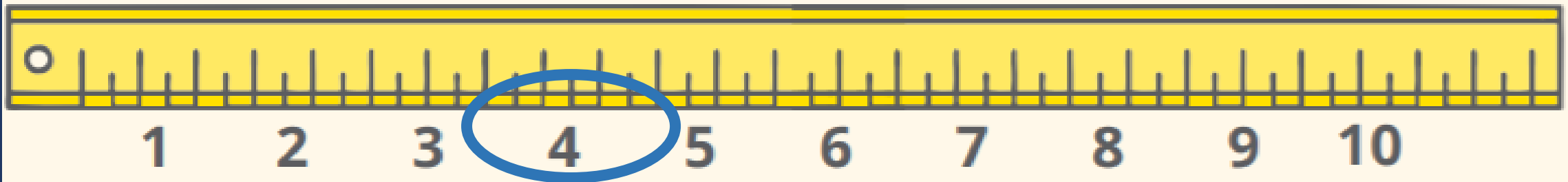


Image of a ruler numbered 1 through 10, with 1 being not confident and 10 being very confident. Number 4 is circled.

# Confidence Ruler: Classroom Setting

- I am at a 4 for confidence to disclose. I am not at a 3 (one number lower) because: I know I have done hard things before and think I could find a way to do this
- For me to go from my current number 4 to a 5 (one number higher) I would need: More information on how to do it, reassurance that my personal information won't get out, and I'd have to find a way to deal with my fear that my professor won't understand.

# Crafting Your Narrative

# What To Say & How To Say It: Classroom

**What would you like to share with your professors about the presence of your condition?**

It's hard to switch between tasks and it's challenging to listen and take notes and participate in discussion at the same time.

**How does your condition impact your role as a student in their class?**

I might seem like I'm not participating but I'm trying really hard to keep up.  
And when I do participate I'm not able to take good notes which makes it hard to study.

**If accommodations have been approved by the Accessibility Office, how do they address these needs?**

I am waiting on approval for a note taker. It would allow me to focus on participation with out missing stuff in my notes. I would feel less stressed in class

# What to Say and How to Say It: Social

**What would you like to share with your friend about the presence of your condition?**

I want to share that I experience episodes of depression and anxiety. I want her to know these things do not define me but do impact me more on some days than others.

**How does your condition impact your relationship/role?**

I would like her to know that sometimes when I am unable to go out or go to yoga class with her it is because I am having a bad day and need to pull back on somethings to do basic self care.

**If accommodations have been approved, what do you need to share with friend if anything?**

I would share that I take my exams in a separate room to maximize my concertation and to get additional test time. I also would share that when I get up frequently in class it is because my anxiety is really bad and I need to take a small break to refocus.

# Your Approach: Deciding When, Where, & How



Image of a completed puzzle with white pieces. One piece is missing, this empty space is blue

# The Script: Classroom

I've really enjoyed participating in your classroom discussions. I'm noticing that I'm struggling to keep up in class, especially when it comes to my notes. They aren't as good as I would like & I'm missing things. I have a condition that some times makes it challenging to switch between tasks like participating and note taking while listening. I work best when I can focus on one at a time. I'm telling you this because I don't want you to think I'm slacking off or that I don't care about the class if I'm not participating as much as I usually do. I was recently given an accommodation for a note taker so won't feel as stressed trying to do it all.

# The Script: Social

I was thinking about our conversation last week, you really trusted me when sharing the issue you were having with your parents. It made me think about things I would like to share with you as well. I hope that you will keep this in confidence just like I promised to keep your family concerns in confidence.

I have anxiety and depression, these things do not define who I am but they can make things harder sometimes. I have wanted to share this with you for a while, it can be so hard though to be open with others about it and I am glad that you and I are close enough for me to share with you. The anxiety and depression are the reasons I take my exams during a separate time from the rest of the class, this allows me a quiet space to focus. I really appreciate you giving me space to share this, thank you for being such a good friend.



# Considering The Reactions of Others

## Classroom

- I may earn respect &/or be viewed as an advocate
- Professors might not see me as fit for my clinical work
- I'm treated differently by faculty

## Social

- Validates & supports me
- Asks additional questions I am uncomfortable with
- Says something offensive
- Does not listen

# Reviewing Your Disclosure Decision

Provides opportunity for reflection and processing with the following prompts:

- What went well with this discussion?
- What would you like to change or improve?
- Do you have any outstanding concerns or questions after your discussion?
- Please describe any additional disclosure support needs moving forward.

# Questions or Comments



Image of a blue box with a question mark  
in the center

# For questions, comments, info, or collaboration...

- Amy Banko: [amy.banko@rutgers.edu](mailto:amy.banko@rutgers.edu)
- Brittany Stone: [brittany.stone@rutgers.edu](mailto:brittany.stone@rutgers.edu)

Please help us to refine the workbook by filling out this shorty survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/K7N5SNX>

# Session Evaluation

- [Link to Session Evaluation Form](https://tinyurl.com/AHEAD2020-SessionEval)  
[tinyurl.com/AHEAD2020-SessionEval](https://tinyurl.com/AHEAD2020-SessionEval)
- Your feedback helps shape future programming.
- Thank you for attending!

## References

- Biebel, K., Mizrahi, R., & Ringeisen, H. (2018). Postsecondary Students With Psychiatric Disabilities Identify Core Services and Key Ingredients to Supporting Education Goals. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 41(4), 299–301. <https://doi-org.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/10.1037/prj0000280>
- Corrigan, P. W., Kosyluk, K. A., Markowitz, F., Brown, R. L., Conlon, B., Rees, J., Rosenberg, J., Ellefson, S., & Al-Khouja, M. (2016). Mental illness stigma and disclosure in college students. *Journal of Mental Health*, 25(3), 224–230. <https://doi-org.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/10.3109/09638237.2015.1101056>

## References

- Kiuvara, S.A. & Huefner, D.S. (2008). Students with psychiatric disabilities in higher education settings: The Americans with Disabilities Act and beyond. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 19(2), 103-113.
- Kranke, D., Jackson, S. E., Taylor, D. A., Anderson-Fye, E., & Floersch, J. (2013). College Student Disclosure of Non-Apparent Disabilities to Receive Classroom Accommodations. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 26(1), 35–51.
- Kupferman, S.I. & Schultz, J.C. (2015). Supporting students with psychiatric disabilities in postsecondary education: Important knowledge, skills, and attitudes. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 28(1), 25-40.

# References

- Lombardi, A. R. & Murray, C. (2011). Measuring university faculty attitudes toward disability: Willingness to accommodate and adopt universal design principles. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 34, 43-56.
- McEwan, R.C. & Downie, R. (2013). College success of students with psychiatric disabilities: Barriers of access and distraction. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 26(3), 233-248.
- Salzer, M., Wick, L., and Rogers, J. (2008). Familiarity with and use of accommodations and supports among postsecondary students with mental illnesses. *Psychiatric Services*, 59(4), 370-375



# References

- Thompson-Ebanks, V., & Jarman, M. (2018). Undergraduate Students with Nonapparent Disabilities Identify Factors that Contribute to Disclosure Decisions. *International Journal of Disability, Development & Education*, 65(3), 286–303. <https://doi-org.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/10.1080/1034912X.2017.1380174>
- Venetis, M. K., Chernichky-Karcher, S., & Gettings, P. E. (2018). Disclosing Mental Illness Information to a Friend: Exploring How the Disclosure Decision-Making Model Informs Strategy Selection. *Health Communication*, 33(6), 653–663. <https://doi-org.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/10.1080/10410236.2017.1294231>
- Woodhead, E.L., Chin-Newman, C., Spink, K., Hoang, M., & Smith, S.A. (2020): College students' disclosure of mental health problems on campus, *Journal of American College Health*, DOI:10.1080/07448481.2019.1706533