

## Mental Health First Aid Changes the Culture of North Carolina's Colleges

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From my experience as a Mental Health First Aid instructor, I have seen the stigma associated with society's treatment of the people with mental illness, especially the negative association of mental health treatment in general. It is a prominent problem today on college campuses. Mental illness and the stigma associated with it not only have a profound effect on students, but also on the school's faculty and staff.



The North Carolina Evidence Based Practices Center offers Mental Health First Aid training to universities and community college campuses working to build mental health literacy by raising awareness and disseminating accurate information regarding mental illness. The NC EBP Center has been an agent of change with students, faculty, staff, and administrators at campuses across North Carolina. Mental Health First Aid has facilitated greater mental health literacy on college communities by empowering and encouraging members of the academic community to identify signs, symptoms, and resources for those with mental illness.

The NC EBP Center provides trainings, technical assistance, and consulting to college campuses statewide. The goal is to

promote mental health literacy, awareness, education, and wellness in North Carolina college communities. Through the Mental Health First Aid training, university and community college staff that attended trainings are changing the way they disseminate information to students, faculty, and staff on mental health and resources.

The university's director of nursing, who was trained in Mental Health First Aid, was so impressed with the program that she has chosen to make it part of the curriculum for a group of her nursing students. She believes it will help them care for patients who may suffer from mental illness.

The director of counseling services reviewed and changed internal policies within the counseling center, altering the way information on mental illness was disseminated on campus. At another college, the counseling services team decided, after attending Mental Health First Aid USA training, to re-educate staff and faculty on the process for referring students to mental health services offered on campus, and on available community mental health resources. The trainings have highlighted the importance of identifying the signs and symptoms of mental illness and how they can affect academic performance and social interaction among students as well as work performance and relationships among staff and faculty.

The NC EBP Center appreciates that the state's universities and community colleges have taken this unique opportunity to change the culture of mental health on their campuses. It is a model approach for working with other statewide organizations that would benefit from Mental Health First Aid USA training.

