

Patrick Lee, *Stanford Hall*
Elaine Teeters, *McGlenn Hall*
Grace Dean, *Director of Health & Well-being*

A RESOLUTION CALLING FOR A GREATER EMPHASIS ON STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

Whereas, On January 21st, 2021, the Division of Student Affairs emailed the student body informing them of the new “[Campus Compact](#)” addendum to Du Lac to which all students would be required to agree prior to the start of the Spring 2021 semester;

Whereas, Notre Dame values both empathy and love for your neighbor, which inherently should make mental health a priority.

Whereas, the Student Senate finds the lack of concern for Student Mental Health in recent University communications and these new rules, even in the section labeled “Health and Wellness,” to be quite troubling.

Whereas, the Student Senate passed Resolution SS 2021-14 entitled “A RESOLUTION TO EMPHASIZE MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19 AND CALL FOR EXPANDED UNIVERSITY SERVICES” on August 27th, 2020 in which it resolved that the University “Formally acknowledge in its communications that COVID-19 concerns may place additional stressors on the mental health of its student body population and that the University values emotional well-being,” and “Prioritize an expansion of University Counseling Center to reduce counseling appointment wait times, despite COVID-19 related budget constraints.”

Whereas, with the new “Campus Compact” and relevant University communication, there has been little acknowledgment of the mental health burden that the new semester and new rules will undoubtedly bring, and, if there has been any relevant increase of University Counseling Center resources or programming, such information has not been made available to the majority of the student body. It is clear, then, that neither of these passed resolutions have been followed.

Whereas, when the University conducted a survey to gauge student’s mental health in the fall semester, the survey conducted found deeply troubling results: 41% (1,521 of 3,709) respondents said that they were experiencing moderate to serious distress due to the coronavirus pandemic and an astounding 18% of students reported that they were under “severe” mental distress;

Whereas, Notre Dame students are not alone in their troubles, as a [study](#) from the Kaiser Family Foundation found that social isolation and loneliness show a link to poor mental health. This study also mentions that “Former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy has brought attention to the widespread experience of loneliness as a public health concern in itself, pointing to its association with reduced lifespan and greater risk of both mental and physical illnesses” ([KFF](#));

Whereas, a study from psychologists at the University of Toronto Health System found that, due to concerns from the coronavirus, the “student population” was “repetitively reported to exhibit more adverse psychiatric symptoms” ([Xiong, et. al.](#)). This study also reported that, “students [...] may also experience more emotional distress due to school closures, cancelation of social events, lower study efficiency with remote online courses, and postponements of exams (Cao et al., 2020).” This was consistent with their findings that “student status was associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms and PTSD symptoms during the COVID-19 outbreak” (Lei et al., 2020; Olagoke et al., 2020, Wang et al., 2020a; Samadarshi et al., 2020) ([Xiong, et. al.](#));

Whereas, furthermore, a study from the American Psychological Association found that “increases in social isolation were unique to students without preexisting mental health concerns [...] which may account for the worsening of their mental health” ([Hamza, et. al.](#));

Whereas, the combination of these four studies suggest something that Notre Dame students already know well: that social isolation can lead to the severe deterioration of mental health;

Whereas, based on the ND-specific survey, over 3,500 students are suffering from moderate to serious distress, a number nearly 2.5 times greater than the number of undergraduates who tested positive for coronavirus. Also according to the data collected, over 1500 undergraduate students, 1500 of our classmates and friends, are in “severe” mental distress—a number *greater* than those who tested positive for coronavirus.

Whereas, based on the statistics, the university should communicate focus at least equally, if not more heavily, about issues regarding mental health in comparison to those relating to coronavirus. This “Campus Compact” has shackled students when increased isolation, based on the science, is a primary cause of student’s affliction while on campus. It seems strange also, if we are really more likely to suffer mental health issues, that we have largely heard silence regarding mental health, compared to this bombshell announcement dropped in our inbox only five days prior to the “matriculating” of Hall Staff;

Whereas, in the 2019-2020 school year Lafortune Student Center, which was a common place for students to socialize on weekends, was open until 3 AM. This allowed students an additional space to safely socialize indoors.

Whereas, the Student Senate fully understands the challenges brought by a winter semester on campus; however, in the interest of our constituents, we simply ask that this stressor, arguably the most prevalent ailment on campus, be addressed by those with the power to change the landscape.

Whereas, this resolution is not meant to imply an attitude negating the dangerous and viral truths regarding the COVID-19 virus, nor is it a denial of the need for disciplinary guidelines; however, it is a plea to place more of an emphasis on the student body’s mental health and well being. It is also not an unwarranted desire for complete freedom; rather, it is a resolution asking the University to partner with its students in order to preserve their mental health.

Resolved, by the Student Senate of the University of Notre Dame du Lac, that the President's office and Division of Student Affairs of the University of Notre Dame du Lac address the problem of Student mental health in the upcoming semester by doing the following:

1. **Expand the operating hours of social buildings, such as LaFortunate Student Center and Duncan Student Centers until 2AM, so students can safely socialize indoors at night.**
2. **Allow a Pass/ No Credit option for classes, similar to the one allowed in the Spring Semester of 2020.**
3. **Be transparent in communication with the student body about the mental health issues and the ways the administration is planning to combat them. Send a monthly or bimonthly email updating students on mental health resources and changes in policies.**
4. **Give mental health the attention it deserves by more genuinely acknowledging the potential impact of 2021 Campus Compact policies on student well-being;**
5. **Release a plan, preferably with input from passionate student leaders, to the student body on how the University intends to increase financial resources towards mental health in order to combat this widespread and pressing issue.**

Rachel Ingal
Student Body President