
COLLEGE STUDENT WELL-BEING HUB PROMOTES STUDENT SUCCESS, RESILIENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH

CURRENT STATE OF MENTAL HEALTH ON CAMPUS

Today's college students face a unique set of challenges. With increased academic pressure, ballooning student loans and the pressure to succeed - half of students report incapacitating levels of stress, 33 percent of students do not return for their sophomore year, and suicide has climbed to the second leading cause of death among college populations.¹ Concurrent with these issues, growth in the number of students seeking services at counseling centers across the country is more than five times the rate of institutional enrollment. These trends have left college campuses unable to meet the demand for comprehensive well-being support.²



50% OF COLLEGE
STUDENTS REPORTING
STRESS LEVELS TO A
POINT OF **NOT BEING
ABLE TO FUNCTION.**

These are more than just personal student problems. Suicides, sexual assaults and substance abuse affect the culture of a campus. Due to the stigma associated with these topics, students rarely discuss or seek information or support about them. Today's professors are spending more and more time acting as de facto counselors. Not only is this a role they are not equipped for, it's a burden that detracts from their abilities to educate the rest of the student population. These issues are being reported by universities both small and large, all across the country. As schools search for answers, it's becoming increasingly clear that new solutions are required.

¹ Henriques, Gregg. (2104). The College Student Mental Health Crisis: Today's college students are suffering from an epidemic of mental illnesses. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/theory-knowledge/201402/the-college-student-mental-health-crisis>

² Center for Collegiate Mental Health. (2016, January). 2015 Annual Report (Publication No. STA 15-108). http://ccmh.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3058/2016/01/2015_CCMH_Report_1-18-2015.pdf



YOU

THE GENESIS OF THE YOU STUDENT WELL-BEING HUB

At Colorado State University, as well as schools on a national scale, strengthening resilience in students is a top priority. As CSU searched for methods for rebuilding resilience, they developed a partnership with Cactus Marketing Communications, an ad agency with significant behavioral health experience. Cactus had recently developed and launched **Man Therapy**, an early intervention mental health program designed to reduce suicides among working-age men. Man Therapy's overwhelming national and international success led to a conversation between Cactus and CSU to determine if Man Therapy could be the right solution for college student populations.

In 2014 Man Therapy was tested with a subset of the CSU population through a series of focus groups. Although students expressed the need for a digital platform for their mental health, the Man Therapy portal proved too narrow a platform to adequately serve the diverse college population, the most obvious deficiency being that Man Therapy is male-specific. In addition, focus groups simply did not connect with the main character, Dr. Rich Mahogany. Students reported that he was not relevant to the issues they faced during the first few years away from home.

ONE THING THAT QUICKLY BECAME CLEAR IS THAT COLLEGE STUDENTS COULD BENEFIT FROM AN EARLY INTERVENTION **MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM DESIGNED WITH THEIR ISSUES IN MIND.**

Plus, a custom-built digital portal could connect with students on their terms through laptops, tablets and smartphones. So Cactus concluded that Man Therapy is not the most effective solution for college settings and chose to start

from scratch. A new problem called for a new team. Grit Digital Health was created to focus on a new solution for college mental health.

PARTNERING WITH COLORADO STATE

After 18-months of development between the Grit and CSU teams, including student focus groups and interdisciplinary input from administration, the YOU portal was created and piloted on campus for an 8-week period.



**YOU FOCUSES
ON SERVING
STUDENTS
RATHER THAN
JUST STUDENT
PROBLEMS.**

The initial planning and research phase revealed the need for a comprehensive solution to well-being. Focus groups with students also led Grit and CSU staff to the first major breakthrough — college mental health problems don't happen in a vacuum. Stress can lead to sleep issues, which can lead to self-medication with drugs and alcohol, which can lead to social withdrawal, which can lead to increased stress on academics and relationships. When students seek help for one specific issue it does little to help their overall well-being, despite opening the door for new conversations and exploration. This insight inspired Grit to develop a completely new student-centric approach to college mental health.

During the pilot period, a controlled group of 1,500 students accessed the portal. From those findings came enhancements to the product's infrastructure and to the multimedia content in order to underscore the fact that YOU focuses on serving students rather than simply serving student problems. This student-centric approach

proved to be an overwhelming success during the spring semester of 2016 when YOU was launched campus-wide at CSU following an email to the campus community from President Tony Frank and Vice President of Student Affairs, Blanche Hughes. During the first semester of YOU @ CSU's soft launch, 15 percent of the undergraduate student body (5,000 students) utilized the online well-being portal. With an array of valuable online and on-campus resources centralized and available to them via YOU, students spent an impressive average time of five minutes on the site per visit.

Through the partnership with CSU, Grit learned that mental health, although important, is simply not an attractive topic of exploration for college populations. Few students see their mental health as a problem amongst the many conflicting demands of college life. It's just not on their radar. Therefore the YOU portal was designed around the global idea of student success. The YOU portal helps students address the new challenges of college life before major damage is done. YOU increases the visibility and effectiveness of campus resources by connecting students to the right resources at the right time. It also promotes inclusion and equity on campuses. Something as simple as meeting the right mentor, getting involved in a campus organization or discovering a new passion can help provide a sense of direction that puts shaky students on the path to success.

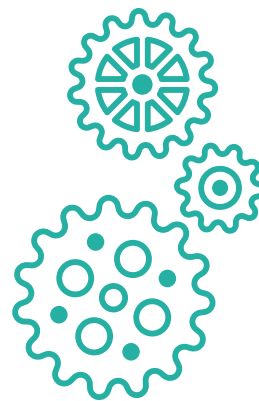
Today's college students are digital natives. The first place they look for help is on the web. Although valuable on their own, individual campus resources lack the ability to effectively address all aspects of student life. In addition to providing original content, the YOU portal aggregates and presents these campus resources with a cohesive look and feel. Plus, by connecting with students before the point of crisis, YOU reduces the strain on other student services, like counseling, which are struggling to keep up with campus demand.

As a development partner, CSU leadership

reviewed content and provided feedback at every step of the process. University stakeholders communicated their wishes for portal content and functionality and enhancements were made incorporating many of these suggestions. The partnership was formalized in a Master Research Development Agreement to allow a team of CSU research faculty to conduct studies on both the pilot and the campus-wide launch to examine the utility of the YOU portal among CSU students.

THE SOLUTION IS YOU

YOU emphasizes individual well-being and self-awareness in order to connect students to information, campus resources, peers and opportunities. From academics and social life, to mental and physical health, YOU is a new kind of solution, focused on skill-building for holistic wellness rather than specific deficiencies. Depending on the need, the want, or the will, students can connect with hundreds of pieces of content within each section of YOU. Students can also use the system-wide search function to locate more specific assistance in the moment.



YOU CONNECTS STUDENTS TO ON-CAMPUS AND ONLINE RESOURCES USING PERSONALIZATION AND BEST PRACTICES TO HELP STUDENTS LEAD PRODUCTIVE, WELL-BALANCED COLLEGE LIVES.

This 360-degree digital tool is optimized for both desktop and mobile viewing, meaning it's available to students 24/7 with privacy and anonymity not normally associated with seeking help.

YOU engages students on their terms and works by connecting with the whole student in three distinct areas of wellness.



SUCCEED – Academic & Career Success

SUCCEED assists with academics connecting students to study tips, tutors, as well as assists with finding internships, jobs, and career paths – supporting campus career centers. The typical barometer for collegiate success, the SUCCEED domain enables students to make commitments to perpetuate their existing successes as well as set future goals.



THRIVE – Physical & Mental Well-Being

Maintaining a sound mind and body are crucial to leading a balanced and fulfilling life. The THRIVE domain enables students to assess, sustain and proactively care for their health amidst the stress of college life. THRIVE specifically assists college counseling centers by increasing visibility, accessibility, and serving as an extension of services.



MATTER – Purpose & Campus Connections

The MATTER domain helps students become aware of their connections to peers, friends and campus, aiding in discovering their passions and encouraging them to make healthy commitments for personal growth. MATTER increases visibility of campus resources to promote a united, connected, and prideful campus that fosters equitable access to resources for all student populations.

HOW YOU WORKS

The YOU portal is designed to blend seamlessly with existing campus digital properties. Students gain entry to the site via their official university email address. To ensure privacy, YOU lives on a completely separate server from the host university. However, by incorporating campus brand standards and the .edu domain architecture, students are presented with a portal that feels like official university property. YOU learns about individual students through a series of Reality Check questionnaires as well as through a student's individual profile.



**THE MORE YOU
LEARNS ABOUT A
STUDENT, THE MORE
RELEVANT AND
PERSONALIZED
CONTENT IT
PROVIDES.**

PORTAL RESEARCH AND PILOT RESULTS

Over the last year, YOU has embedded itself into the student health services within the CSU community. Spanning a full calendar year on campus, YOU has now been available to students encountering mid-terms, final exams, the end-of-semester internship/career search and first-year orientation to name just a few of the major stages in the college experience.

To measure this success apart from web analytics, the research team at CSU has conducted three phases of focus groups and subsequent surveys. The survey was capped at 350 respondents, who were asked questions regarding personal demographics, the level of personal relevancy of YOU and the level to which YOU can support students with their college experience.

The largest group of respondents (23 percent) were first-year students. Despite being launched

only months before, the portal received more than 7,000 visits. Unique visits averaged an impressive five minutes per visit. **Of the 350 students surveyed, 92 percent reported learning something new about their physical and mental wellbeing on the portal – increasing student self-awareness and the likelihood that physical & mental health are priority areas throughout their college experience.**

In the same survey, **87 percent of all students surveyed reported an increased awareness of campus resources and 76 percent reported being better able to manage stress as a result of YOU @ CSU.** Not only does this benefit students, it benefits the faculty and staff, and thus, the university as a whole by simply connecting those seeking resources with those who provide them. YOU increases the effectiveness and equitable access of campus resources for all student populations.

With such success, CSU and Grit started an integration plan for YOU to be introduced as part of the first-year orientation process and Ram Welcome weekend. Promotional tactics consisting of trainings with Orientation Leaders and Ram Welcome Leaders, articles placed in the official orientation brochure and sessions where an introductory YOU @ CSU video was shown to students collectively led to an increase in the YOU @ CSU user base. During orientation for the incoming class of 2016, over 1,500 new students created accounts on the portal, allowing them the opportunity to explore campus resources prior to the start of fall semester. These students spent an average of five-and-a-half minutes on the site per visit with most frequent events including marking favorite content, completing the SUCCEED Reality Check and using the search function for terms like, “sleep”, “stress” and “anger”.

During the week following convocation, 500 students created accounts on YOU, thus positioning YOU as a reliable place to turn for students curious about campus resources, personal and academic success.



As of October 2016, YOU @ CSU has hosted 15,000 visits from 10,000 unique users averaging five minutes and fifteen seconds per visit.



During first-year orientation in the summer of 2016, 1,500 incoming students registered for YOU @ CSU, accessing campus resources before the start of fall semester.

350 students complete spring survey

23% FRESHMEN

20% SOPHOMORES

19% JUNIORS

20% SENIORS

18% GRAD STUDENTS

87%

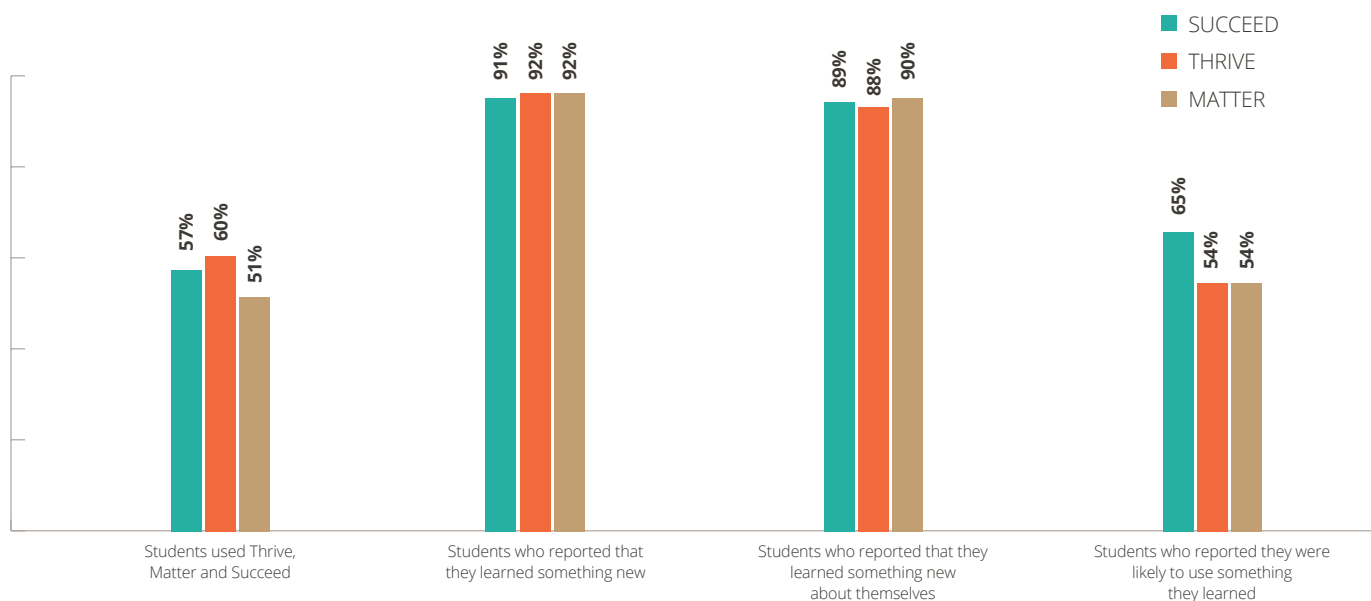
reported increasing their awareness of campus resources

76%

reported that their interaction with YOU helped them manage their stress

92%

reported learning something new across all 3 sections of the portal (SUCCEED, THRIVE and MATTER)



MOST FREQUENTED CONTENT

- CSU Suicide/ Crisis Information
- Ross Szabo: Video on Anxiety
- Assessment: "What's Your Learning Style?"
- Internship Application Tips
- SilverCloud CBT Module on Anxiety
- CSU Career Center

Despite the overall enthusiasm for YOU, the survey also revealed areas where the portal could improve. Students expressed a desire for different and interactive ways to communicate with the portal in the moment, as opposed to simply relying on data stored in the Reality Checks. Students also asked for even more customized content, particularly with regard to their year in school and their major. Graduate and professional students also expressed interest in a more personalized experience specific to their unique stressors. Students indicated they would like to see content periodically refreshed to pull them back into the portal, especially around specific times throughout the academic year (e.g., final exams, holiday breaks, etc.) Finally, students requested features allowing for greater social interaction within the portal. Suggestions included a daily question with live results as well as highlighting the most popular cards among the student body. This feedback is currently being incorporated into the platform, with continuous updates to address each focus area.

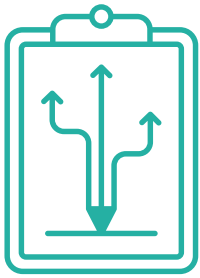
YOU & CAMPUS RESOURCE PLANNING

YOU also includes a campus dashboard that allows campuses to view aggregate data regarding students' usage of the site in real-time. YOU provides quantitative data regarding which resources are most viewed by students, as well as search teams utilized by students. This data can be broken down by student year, type of student, and specific date ranges, to name a few. This data informs two invaluable feedback loops. First, aggregate user data guides the behavioral health experts at Grit in the development and/or expansion of content areas within the portal. This ensures that content is always relevant and up-to-date according to students' current priority areas. Secondly, aggregate user data provides administrators an inside look into the heartbeat of issues on campus, while maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of students. This is the first time that campus administrators have the ability to access this valuable data in real-time, enabling the specific allocation of time and resources to be devoted to the most pressing campus issues. This can inform the development of outreach efforts, as well as programming for specific populations.

WHAT'S NEXT

YOU continues to be a valuable resources to all CSU students, faculty, and staff. Content updates are continuously added to the YOU portal on current campus topics that evolve with the current campus landscape – in line with national and campus specific topic areas.

The effectiveness of the YOU portal on college campuses will continue to be evaluated.



WHILE THE COST
OF IMPLEMENTING
THE YOU PROGRAM
IS FIXED, **THE
POTENTIAL VALUE
IS IMPOSSIBLE TO
FULLY MEASURE.**

WHY YOU

In addition to serving as an upstream college wellness portal, YOU provides a platform for universities to learn about the issues facing their student body like never before. Increased student wellness benefits not only individual students, but the campus culture as a whole. As YOU continues to evolve, the potential benefits are limitless. **However, when it comes to student health, one thing that has become clear for universities across the country is the catastrophic cost of doing nothing.**

PRAISE FOR YOU

We believe YOU will prove to be an extraordinary asset for the students, faculty and staff of Colorado State University. While the tool is tailored to students, we believe it can be a valuable resource for our faculty and staff as they work with the student community.

Tony Frank

President,
Colorado State University

This is a phenomenal example of the strength of a public/private partnership where all parties share a passion for helping our current generation of students with a pressing social issue to improve mental health, coping, and resiliency skills.

Blanche Hughes

Vice President For Student Affairs,
Colorado State University

You@CSU is an innovative new way of reaching students in their time, using their language diminishing shame and stigma related to seeking support.

Anne Hudgens

Executive Director of the CSU Health Network,
Colorado State University

YOU offers suggestions, tips, tools and resources based solely on what is important to the individual. Not what we think is important for them. That is very unique. Nobody likes to be told 'what to do.' YOU is different in how it asks students what they want to do and what they want to focus on.

Janelle Patrias

Manager Of Mental Health Initiatives, CSU Health
Network, Colorado State University

CONTACT

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PRAISE FOR **YOU** (CONTD.)

As a counselor, I was excited to learn about YOU and be able to use it in sessions to help students navigate the seemingly countless resources on campus. I mainly use it as an extension of services by having students explore specific areas of content between sessions like mindfulness/breathing exercises if they are coming in for anxiety, or clubs if they are having trouble connecting with people on campus.

Dorothy Demers, M.A.

Counselor at CSU Health Network
Post-Master's Fellow
Colorado State University

YOU is a portal that allows self-reflection and provides students with information and resources to be their best selves, both within and outside of CSU.

CSU student from pilot study
