

Mental Health among UCLA Undergraduates

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years increased attention has been focused on the mental health of college students. As the college environment has become increasingly competitive concerns have emerged about the potential impact of such an environment, particularly as it relates to the potential for creating an undue amount of stress in students' lives. This report draws together data from several sources including, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), the University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES), and the Ashe Center Student Survey to create a portrait of UCLA students' mental health. The analysis focused on two primary questions: 1) What is the state of students' mental health as they enter UCLA, and 2) Do different groups of students show different patterns of mental health concerns and behaviors.

The findings reveal that over one half of incoming freshmen rate their emotional health as "above average" or "top 10%," a rate slightly higher than students at comparison institutions. However, over one half also report feeling depressed frequently or occasionally in the past year. In addition, one quarter of students "frequently" felt overwhelmed by all they had to do in the past year, while another two thirds reported feeling this way occasionally. The majority of entering freshmen anticipate that they will seek personal counseling while in college, and do so at a rate considerably higher than students at comparison institutions.

Transfer students show poorer mental health than direct-entry students on measures of positive affect, psychological wellbeing, anxiety, depression, and psychological distress, as well as overall mental health. Comparison of various stressors indicates that transfer students are more likely than direct-entry students to struggle with finances, transportation issues, care for others, and managing stress.

The data also reveal that Asian/Asian American students are more likely to experience poorer mental health but are less likely to seek out and use services than other students.

These findings have important implications for the provision and marketing of services to particular groups that are at greater risk, which need to be considered in the future.

II. INTRODUCTION

As the college environment has become increasingly competitive and stressful, supporting the mental health of students has become a topic of concern. Students with poorer mental health are more likely to struggle with adjustment and persistence in the college environment. This briefing combines data from multiple sources to provide an overview of the mental health of UCLA students throughout the college experience. The data compiled in this report supplement the presentation of mental health issues at the October 2005 Student Affairs Leadership Forum (SALF), providing more depth on the topics covered. It is intended to contribute to thinking about how to serve students, particularly how to focus limited resources to best address their developmental needs.

The analysis focused on several main questions, including:

- What is the state of students' mental health as they enter UCLA?
 - What pre-existing mental health concerns, if any, do students bring with them as entering students?
- Do students show different patterns of mental health concerns and behaviors?
 - Are there differences on various measures of mental health?
 - Do different groups seek care for mental health at different rates?
 - Do the data suggest any differences in student experiences that might account for these differences?

This report does not focus on gender differences in the data. Where differences are observed in the data, they are consistent with national data and trends that reveal women reporting more help-seeking and experiencing stress and poor mental health at higher rates than men. The question still remains as to whether these results reflect actual differences in experience or are a result of women being socialized to be willing to share and express their feelings and concerns. This document also focuses solely on undergraduates. More information about the mental health findings for graduate students, as well as the differences by gender, can be found in the report "2002 Ashe Center Student Survey: Findings and Recommendations for Building Healthy Learning Communities" produced by the Health Education Unit, Arthur Ashe Student Health and Wellness Center (available in PDF in the "About Us" section at www.studenthealth.ucla.edu).

III. DATA SOURCES

This briefing draws from several sources of data about UCLA undergraduate students.

Name	Conducted by	Date(s)	Sample
Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey (CIRP)	UCLA, through the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI)	1973-2004	Surveys all incoming first-time, first-year students who attend orientation. Administered during the summer <i>prior</i> to first year. Response rates are well over 50%.
Supplemental items included by UCLA in the CIRP Freshman Survey	UCLA, through the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI)	2003	Same as above
Comparison data from CIRP for other highly selective public universities	Higher Education Research Institute (HERI)	1994-2004	Data from incoming first-time, first-year students at highly selective public universities ¹ that participated in the CIRP and had an institutional response rate of 75% or higher.
Ashe Center Student Survey (Ashe 2002)	Health Education Unit, Arthur Ashe Student Health and Wellness Center	Spring 2002	Surveyed all currently enrolled undergraduate and graduate students. Undergraduate sample was 3613, a response rate of 18%.
University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES 2004)	Managed by the Center for Studies in Higher Education (UC Berkeley) in collaboration with an Institutional Research work group and an Oversight Committee with representation from all campuses and UCOP.	Spring 2004	Surveyed all currently enrolled undergraduates. UCLA response rate was 20%, as sample size of 6372.

These different sources of data represent students at various points in their college careers and are collected at varying time points utilizing varied methods, questions, and methods of categorizing students (i.e. ethnicity coding). Therefore, the data generally cannot be combined across data sources. However, by pulling together the findings from several data sets, it is possible to construct a rich portrait of the mental health of UCLA students.

¹ University is defined by CIRP as “an institution that awards a substantial number of doctoral-level degrees in at least five different disciplines.” Highly-selective universities are those with an average SAT composite score of the entering class higher than 1140. This stratification cell contains an average of about 15 institutions per year.

III. FINDINGS

A. Entering Freshmen (does not include transfer students)

Emotional Health

- At entry, over half of incoming freshmen rated their “emotional health” as “above average” or “top 10%” compared to others their age (see Figure 1). This pattern of responses has stayed very consistent over time (1994-2004).
- UCLA students’ ratings of their emotional health are slightly higher than those of students at comparison institutions (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. UCLA Students' Self Ratings of Emotional Health at Time of Entry (CIRP 2004; N=2832)

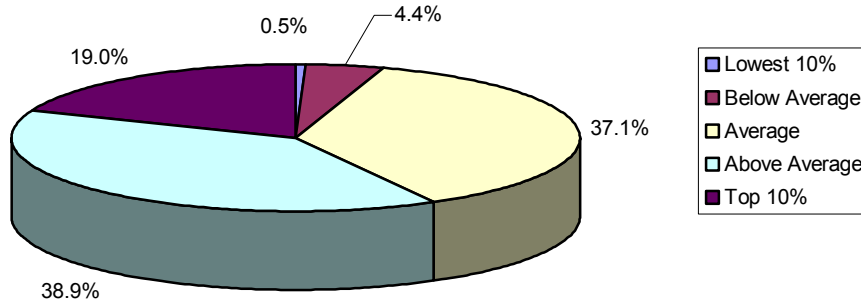
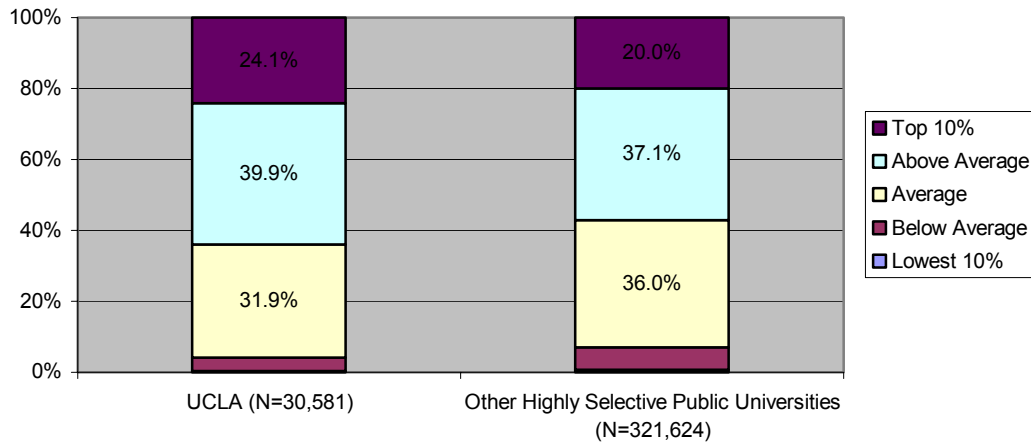
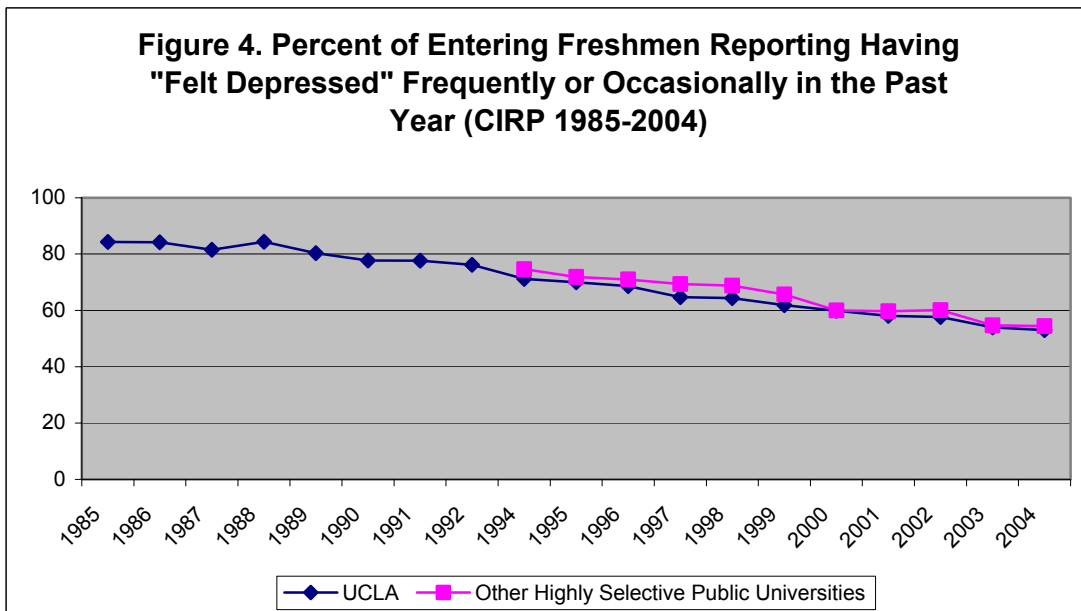
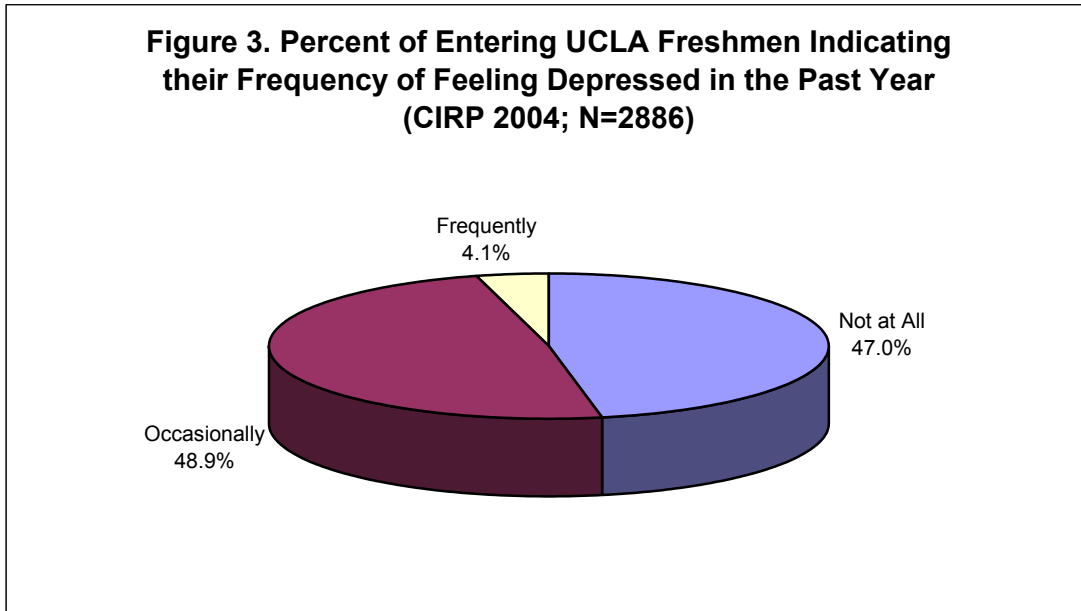


Figure 2. Student Ratings of Emotional Health: 11 Year Averages (1994-2004)



Depression

- In 2004, more than one half of incoming freshmen indicated that they had “felt depressed” in the past year either “frequently” or “occasionally” (see Figure 3).
- The percentage of UCLA students reporting having felt depressed in the past year has declined over time (see Figure 4.) This trend is similar to findings at comparison institutions. This is possibly due to increasing public awareness of the clinical definition of depression, making students less likely to apply it to themselves, rather than an actual significant change in what students are experiencing.



Feeling Overwhelmed

- Approximately one quarter of entering freshmen in 2004 indicated that they frequently “felt overwhelmed” in the past year, while another two-thirds reported feeling this way occasionally (see Figure 5).
- The percentage of students reporting having felt overwhelmed in the past year has remained very consistent over time, and is similar to the responses of students at comparison institutions (see Figure 6).

Figure 5. Percent of Entering UCLA Freshmen Indicating their Frequency of Feeling Overwhelmed in the Past Year (CIRP 2004; N=2885)

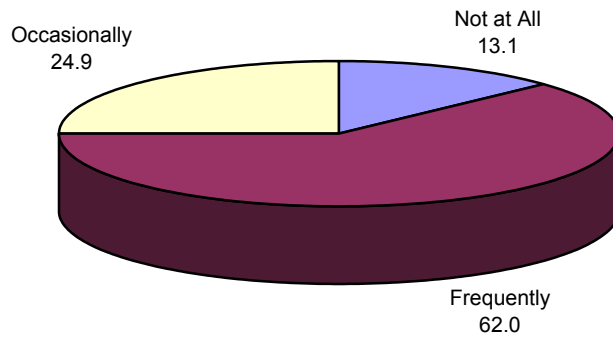
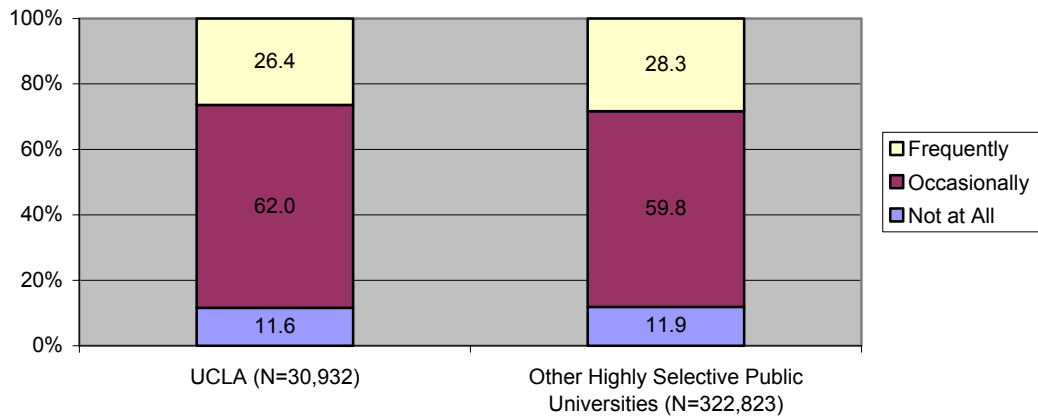


Figure 6. Percent of Entering Freshmen Reporting Feeling Overwhelmed in the Past Year: 11 Year Averages (CIRP 1994-2004)

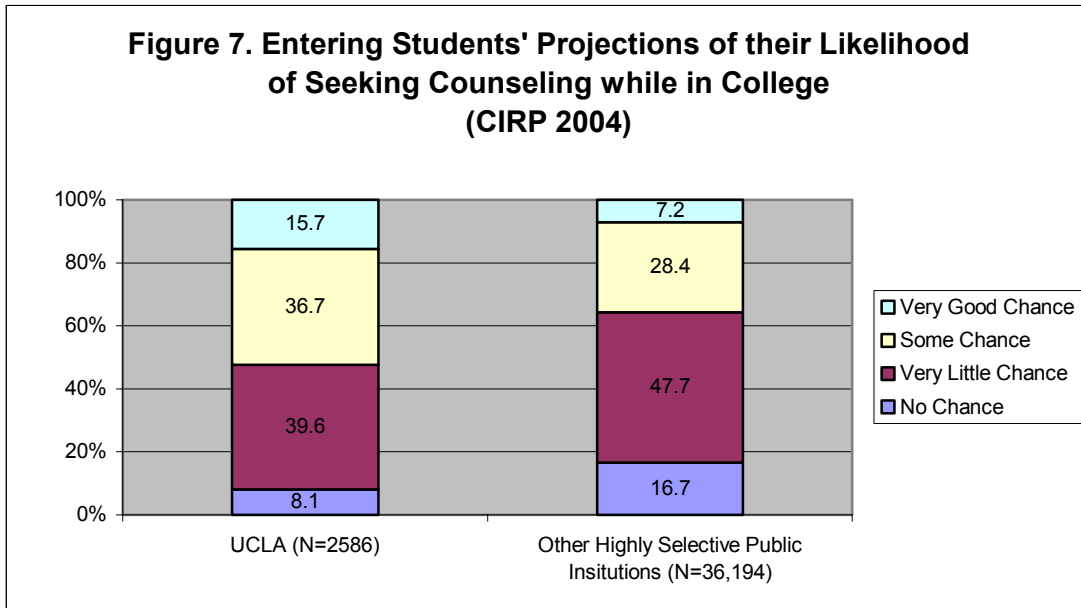


Seeking Treatment

- A small percentage of students entered UCLA in 2003 reporting having already sought out mental health treatment (see Table 1.) However, a majority of students (52.4%) anticipated there is “some” or a “very good chance” that they will need to seek personal counseling sometime during their college career, a percentage that is higher than that reported by students at comparison institutions (see Figure 7.)

Table 1: Percent of Entering Freshmen Indicating Use of Mental Health Resources in the Past Year (CIRP 2003; N=3051)

Sought Mental Health Consultation	4.5
Took Medication for Mental Health Conditions	2.0



B. Transfer Students versus Direct-Entry Students

- Transfer students showed poorer mental health than direct-entry students on measures of positive affect, psychological wellbeing, anxiety, depression, and psychological distress, as well as overall mental health (see Figure 8; for more on the RAND scales see the 2002 Ashe Center Student Survey report).
- Comparison of various stressors indicated that transfer students were more likely than students who enter UCLA as freshmen to struggle with finances, transportation issues, care for others, and managing stress (see Figure 9 and Table 2). These differences are not surprising, given that transfer students were more likely to report living off-campus and with family members as well as spending more time providing physical care (see Table 3.)
- These data suggest that transfer students have greater problems dealing with life balance. The transfer population is not the only group that deals with many roles and demands, but as a group tend to have a higher proportion of these students.

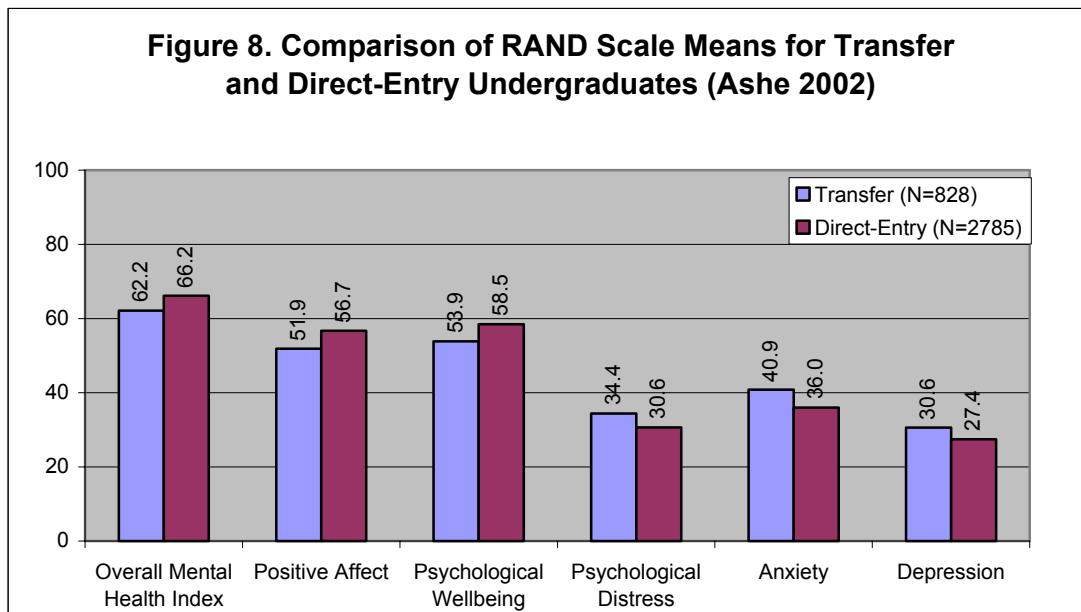


Figure 9. Comparison of Transfer and Direct-Entry Undergraduates' Mean Stress Ratings (Ashe 2002)
(1=Not at all stressful to 7=Extremely stressful)

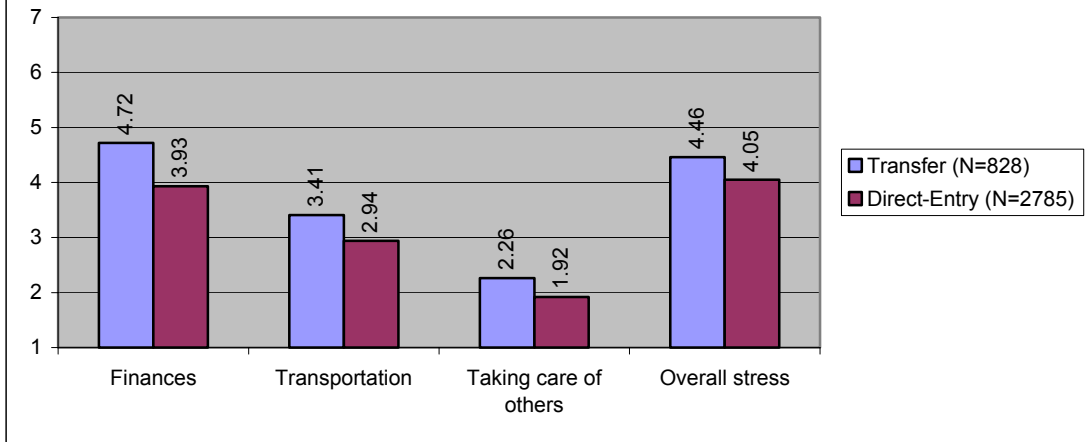


Table 2. Percent of Students Reporting Various Levels of Difficulty Managing Aspects of Student Life (UCUES 2004)

		Direct-Entry Admit	Transfer Admit
Achieving a High Enough GPA	No trouble	16.7	15.5
	A little trouble	27.4	27.6
	Some trouble	31.4	32.1
	A lot of trouble	24.5	24.7
	N	3858	1621
Time Management	No trouble	11.3	11.0
	A little trouble	34.7	32.2
	Some trouble	33.4	35.1
	A lot of trouble	20.5	21.7
	N	3860	1620
Handling Stress	No trouble	15.5	13.1
	A little trouble	38.5	32.5
	Some trouble	30.5	33.0
	A lot of trouble	15.6	21.4
	N	3844	1616
Managing Finances	No trouble	32.9	23.3
	A little trouble	33.9	31.2
	Some trouble	22.5	28.2
	A lot of trouble	10.6	17.3
	N	3852	1608

Table 3: Comparison of Transfer and Direct-Entry Undergraduates' Domestic Situations

	Transfer (N=828)	Direct-Entry (N=2785)
Off Campus--Apartment or House	83.8%	47.1%
Live with Family	17.5%	7.7%
Live with Children	4.0%	0.4%
Provide Physical Care ¹	25.0%	10.6%

¹Combined percentage of those who reported providing care all, most, or a good bit of the time.

Table 4. Percent of Students Reporting Utilization of Student Psychological Services (SPS) by Entry Status (UCUES 2004)

	Direct-Entry Admit (N=3511)	Transfer Admit (N=1456)
Never heard of it ¹	12.4	17.2
Needed and didn't use	12.8	16.8
Used it once	6.2	6.3
Used it occasionally	4.7	6.3
Used it often	2.7	3.6

¹Totals sum to more than 100 because "never heard of it" asked in a separate question

C. Comparisons by Ethnicity and Generational Status

- Analysis of six key mental health measures (RAND scales) revealed that while many students appear to be experiencing a considerable amount of stress, Asian American students appear to be at particular risk (see Figure 10). Specifically, on the Overall Mental Health Index, Asian/Asian American respondents had a significantly lower mean than both Caucasian and Chicano/Latino respondents. On the Psychological Distress and Depression measures, Asian/Asian American students scored significantly higher than their Caucasian and Chicano/Latino counterparts. Multiethnic, Caucasian and Asian respondents were also higher on the Anxiety measure than Black/African American respondents. There were no significant ethnic differences on the Psychological Wellbeing and Positive Affect measures.
- The data also revealed that Asian/Asian American students are often the least likely to seek out and use mental health services, either those available on campus or use of mental health services overall (see Tables 5 and 6).
- Students with both parents born outside the US also reported lower rates of mental health care-seeking and use of mental health medications than those with both parents born in the US (see Table 5).

Figure 10. RAND Scale Means for Undergraduates by Ethnicity (Ashe 2002)

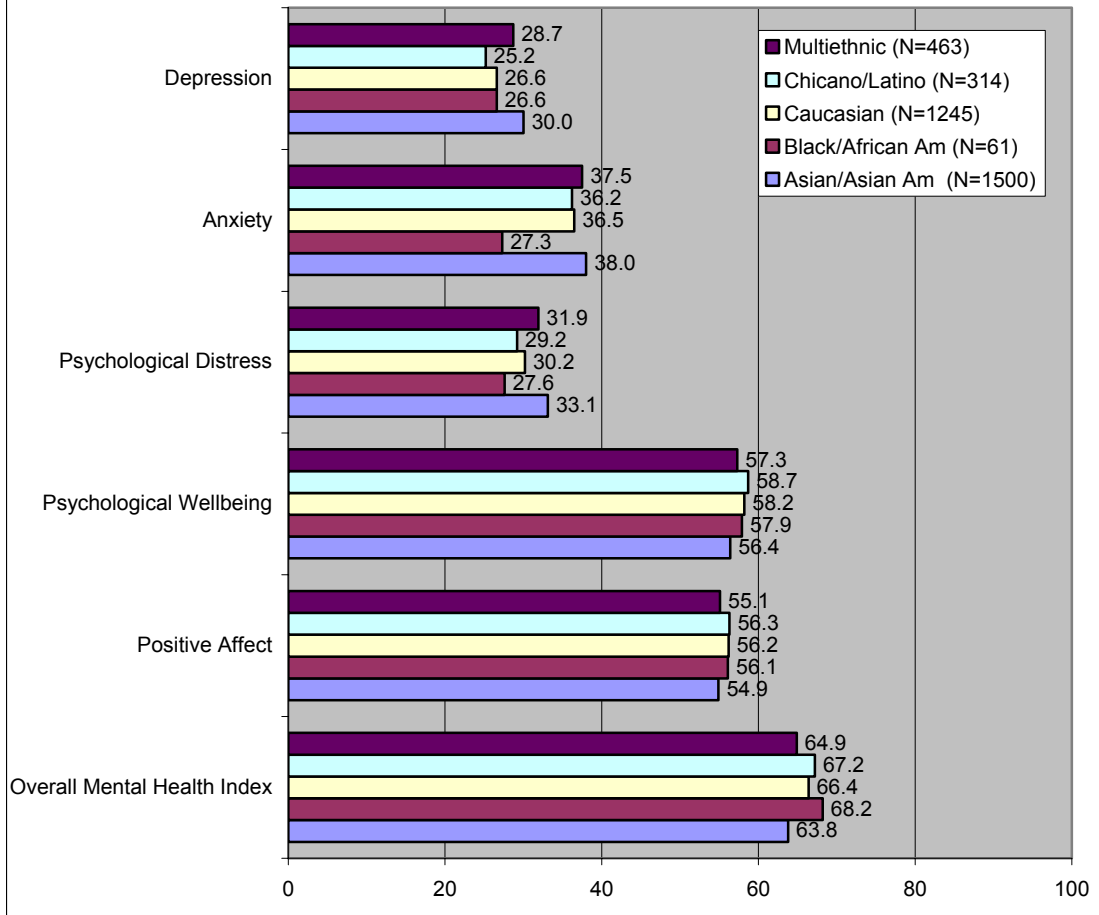


Table 5: Percent of Undergraduate Students Reporting Mental Health Care-Seeking by Ethnicity and Generational Status (Ashe 2002)

		Sought Mental Health Consultation In Past Year	Prescribed or Taking Medication for Mental Health Conditions
Ethnicity			
Asian/Asian American	(N=1500)	10.9	1.9
Black/African American	(N=61)	16.4	1.6
Caucasian	(N=1245)	19.4	8.2
Chicano/Latino	(N=314)	14.0	2.9
Multiethnic	(N=463)	13.8	5.0
Parents Birthplace			
Both in US	(N=1247)	19.2	7.8
One in US	(N=315)	14.9	6.7
Both Outside US	(N=2051)	11.8	2.4

Table 6. Percent of Students Reporting Utilization of Student Psychological Services (SPS) by Ethnicity (UCUES 2004)

		Didn't need	Needed but didn't use	Used once/ occasionally	Used often
American Indian	(N=32)	56.3	12.5	21.9	9.4
Asian	(N=1880)	76.2	13.1	9.2	1.5
Black	(N=143)	64.3	16.8	15.4	3.5
Chicano/Latino	(N=624)	63.1	17.6	14.3	5.0
International Student	(N=180)	63.3	20.0	13.4	3.3
White	(N=1744)	72.8	12.4	11.6	3.2
Other	(N=125)	64.0	15.2	14.4	6.4