



University of Virginia Psychologist Testifies Before Homeland Security on Making America's College Campuses Safer

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April 24, 2007, WASHINGTON - Psychologist Russ Federman, PhD, ABPP, Director of Counseling and Psychological Services at the University of Virginia testified today before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs on the mental and emotional health of college students and responses on university campuses across the United States. In his testimony, Dr. Federman called for more funding to meet the increasing demand for student mental health services across the country.

In response to the violent rampage at Virginia Tech last week, experts were called to Capitol Hill to offer ways to address safety on college and university campuses. Dr. Federman, who has directed student counseling services for over 15 years, specifically addressed the mental and behavioral health needs of students and made the case for universities and colleges to devote more resources to the mental health needs of their students.

According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, there are close to 18 million students enrolled in colleges and universities nationwide. From a 2006 National Survey of Counseling Center Directors that surveyed 376 directors, 8.9 percent (1.6 million) or one in every 11 enrolled student sought counseling or psychological help in the past year.) At the University of Virginia, said Federman, one third of the students seeking psychological services were depressed and one fifth of the students had anxiety disorders. But most of the work at the counseling center is devoted to crisis intervention with students, said Federman. nationally and at UVA, college counseling centers are faced with high-volume, high-risk and very serious illnesses.

However, Federman noted that while university counseling centers are seeing more students struggling with mental health issues, the frequency of seeing students that pose a significant danger to others or themselves as a result of mental illness is very small. he kinds of mental disturbances exhibited by Seung Hui Cho [in VA Tech shootings] which yield extreme violence are rare.

He need to strike a careful balance between students rights to confidentiality and the college and university personnel need to inform authorities and students?parents when a student might pose a danger to him/herself or others,said Federman. it is important to protect the crucial feature of patient-therapist confidentiality. This assurance allows many students to reach out in the first place. If students perceive confidentiality as a dispensable right, they might not seek professional help.

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