

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Gardner-Webb Offers Various Mental Health Awareness Programs and Initiatives

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Counselors and Student-Led Groups Share Strategies for Wellness

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—This fall, the American Psychological Association (<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/10/mental-health-campus-care>) reported that more than 60% of college students met the criteria for at least one mental health challenge. The counselors at Gardner-Webb University, like others across the nation, are working to meet the needs of students through additional mental health awareness programs and initiatives. Gardner-Webb Counseling Services Director Stephanie Allen shared that her staff is available to students in three locations: the main office on the third floor of Tucker Student Center and satellite offices in Suttle Wellness Center and the College of Health Sciences.

Allen said the counselors are also available in Tucker Student Center every other week during the semester for “Table Talk Thursdays.” In this informal setting, students stop by a table set up on the second floor to chat with a counselor about the topic of the day, such as coping skills, stress management, confidence/self-esteem, self-care and gratitude.

The counseling staff also partners with Athletics, noted Carrie Drake Baker, director of Academic Services for Student-Athletes. “Mental health is a priority for us as an athletic department and for SAAC (Student-Athlete Advisory Committee), and our student-athletes know that it is a priority, too.” Baker affirmed. “We want them to do well academically and on the field, but we really want them to be well-rounded and healthy.”

Additionally, four members of the women’s lacrosse team—Jordan Garrison, Reese Jones, Kyla Paacucci and Avery Callan—share mental health strategies with teammates and friends as

ambassadors for an organization called Morgan's Message (<https://www.morgansmessage.org/>). The non-profit is named for Morgan Rodgers, a lacrosse player for Duke University (Durham, N.C.). Rodgers took her own life in 2019, shocking her family, friends and teammates who had no idea she had a problem.



The mission of Morgan's Message is to equalize the treatment of physical and mental health in athletics and address the taboo subject. Garrison, Jones, Paacucci and Callan encourage their peers to talk about their feelings and, most of all, to realize they are not alone. Earlier in the semester, Jones led a yoga session, and 60 people attended.

"We are working to speak up about the stigma and increase the resources for athletes so that the options are vast and available for all," Jones stated. "Being a Morgan's Message Ambassador has been such an amazing opportunity, as while we are sharing these strategies with others, we are also gaining so many ourselves."

Those strategies include finding strength in community, breathing and relaxation techniques, comforting those who are struggling and more practical tips and advice.

To learn about future events and meetings, follow Morgan's Message at GWU on Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/morgansmessagegwu/>).

For more information about GWU's Counseling Services, stop by the office on the third floor of Tucker Student Center and leave contact information at the front desk. Or, email Counseling Services (<mailto:counselingservices@gardner-webb.edu>) or call 704-406-2729.

Dean's List Podcast: Episode 1, Mental Health Awareness

On episode 1 of the Dean's List, learn more about mental health awareness and the programs, services and initiatives offered at Gardner-Webb for students. Hosted by Lesley Villarose, vice president for Student Development and dean of students, the guests are Stephanie Allen, director of Counseling Services, Carrie Drake Baker, director of Academic Services for Student-Athletes, and Blake Elizalde, SGA president. The episode also features four GWU Women's Lacrosse players and the work they're doing through an organization called Morgan's Message.

Gardner-Webb University is North Carolina's recognized leader in private, Christian higher education. A Carnegie-Classified Doctoral/Professional University, GWU is home to nine colleges and schools, more than 80 undergraduate and graduate majors, and a world-class faculty. Located on a beautiful 225-acre campus in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb prepares graduates to impact their chosen professions, equips them with the skills to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and inspires them to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of others. Ignite your future at [Gardner-Webb.edu](https://gardner-webb.edu/) (<https://gardner-webb.edu/>).