

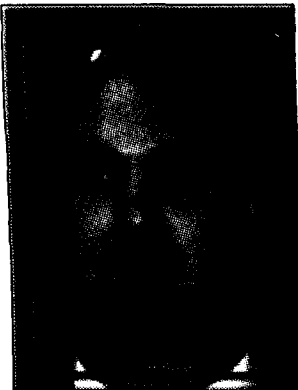
SPEAK OUT

How do you feel about finals fast approaching?



Andrea Davis
Humanities

"Stressed, but actually excited too because I'm graduating this semester. I just can't wait until it's all over."



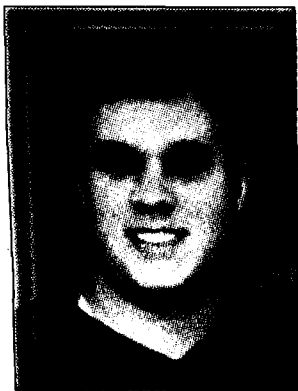
Sean Kennedy
American Studies

"I need the break so it's not coming fast enough."



Lokia Clarke
Communications

"I feel like I don't want to take them but, I'm not stressing over them. Majority of them are final papers and presentations so I'm not that worried. Besides I'm only a 1st semester junior."



Todd McGuckin
IST

"Stressed!"



Pam Myers
Applied Behavioral Science

"I only have two finals so I am not worried about them."

Feeling Stressed?

Penn State Harrisburg offers free counseling services for students

By Rachel Shepherd
Features Editor

Having problems studying for finals? Or how about dealing with your peers, your family, or the stress of the holidays? Sounds like most students this time of year, but fortunately Penn State offers a free counseling service for students. The service, located in the Student Assistance Center of Olmsted, assists students in dealing with everyday challenges through academic and personal counseling.

Steve Backels, Ph. D., director of psychological counseling programs at Penn State, says what he loves about his job is making a difference in somebody's life. "I see someone in pain," he says, "and I know that I might have helped them work past that." Backels has been the director of the program since 1991. He works with the counselors and staff as they decide how to approach mental health issues as well as counseling his own students.

Backels' approach to counseling is not to give the student too much advice. Rather, he helps the individual explore their situation. "It's the student who has to live with the choices they make," he says.

Mindy Reed, LSW, Philadelphia College of Medicine Practicum student and counselor at PSU since April, says both personal advice and professional teachings come into play when she is counseling a student. "It is not only my personal experience, but other personal experiences that I share with the students," she says. "It is so much more enriching and balancing this way."

Both Backels and Reed say that being a counselor has enriched their own lives as well. Reed says that students' being able to share their lives with you, to open up and talk about them, is great. "People teach me things everyday," she says. "When you are dealing with daily issues, you have to reflect on the type of decisions and types of approaches you take as well."

Backels revealed his challenge starting out as a counselor which was not being able to put aside the students problems outside of the office. He needed to establish boundaries in order to counsel students more effectively.

Now, he says, his biggest challenge is keeping up with the research. "We need to keep up with the studies and all of the changes in mental health, medications, and try different therapies to provide the best service," he says.

All of the counselors admitted to growing attached to students because of the relationship that is built between them. "The relationship with the students is wonderful," says Reed. "It allows you to have a glimpse into someone's life and you can't help but wonder (after counseling is completed) how things turned out. It is very typical of the relationship."

Alia Harwick, elementary education, recently took the step to improving her health, by talking to a counselor in the program. She says it helped her to relieve stress and feel better because someone was there to listen. More importantly, she takes advantage of the free service and the confidentiality. Her advice to students hesitant about talking to a counselor is, "just going and making the appointment is half the battle. Once, you have done that, you know help is only one more stop away."

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