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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 4, 2019

News Release

Regents focus attention on student behavioral health challenges

MADISON, Wis. – Reflecting national trends, the number of students in the University of Wisconsin System seeking help for behavioral health issues has increased dramatically over the last decade.

As detailed in a presentation to the Board of Regents Thursday, student visits to campus counseling centers across the UW System have increased by 55% since 2010, with depression and anxiety the most prevalent issues. The number of students who have considered suicide is also on the rise.

“It is our duty as educators to put our students in the best possible position to succeed,” UW System President Ray Cross said. “Research shows that behavioral health issues significantly affect the academic success and retention of our students.”

According to National College Health Assessment (NCHA) data, 23% of UW System students reported being diagnosed or treated for depression in 2015, and 27% reported being diagnosed or treated for anxiety.

While it is a positive sign that students are increasingly comfortable seeking services, the challenge is keeping pace with the need. Currently, behavioral health issues account for nearly one-third of student visits to UW System’s campus health services centers. Furthermore, because of limited access to psychiatric services, students are increasingly relying on campus health services for this support. Access to psychotropic medication assessment and management is also a struggle.

To meet demand, many campuses have increased the number of counselors available, but a panel of Senior Student Affairs Officers told Regents that it’s an ongoing challenge to keep up.

According to the 2017-18 UW System Counselling Impact Assessment Program, 22% of students thought about leaving school prior to counseling and 77% of those who considered leaving school said counseling helped them persist. In addition, 83% said their primary health issues improved due to counseling services

In addition to increased staffing, other suggested tactics to help students included increased training on how to recognize and treat behavioral health issues, and greater partnership with the K-12 system.

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The University of Wisconsin System serves more than 170,000 students. Awarding 36,000 degrees annually, the UW System is Wisconsin’s talent pipeline, putting graduates in position to increase their earning power, contribute to their communities, and make Wisconsin a better place to live. More than 80 percent of UW System graduates stay in Wisconsin five years after earning a degree. The UW System provides a 23:1 return on state investment. UW System institutions also contribute to the richness of Wisconsin’s culture and economy with groundbreaking research, new companies and patents, and boundless creative intellectual energy.

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