**By: Brynn Laurash**

**UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa.** - Bailey Hakala sat on her bed in her downtown apartment surrounded by material for her four upcoming exams yet she was too paralyzed to study.

“I felt like I couldn’t move,” Hakala, a Penn State sophomore, said about her stress-induced anxiety. “I had four exams in a span of six days and all the hours in the day weren’t enough for me to get everything done.”

About 44 million adults experience mental health issues in a given year and more than 75 percent of mental health conditions start before the age of 24, according to the National Alliance on Mental Health. Many of these adults are college students.

At colleges across the country, including Penn State, students suffer from mental health issues that interfere with their school work, and organizations such as CAPS try to help students who are struggling.

Having anxiety isn’t new to Hakala, who has suffered with it since high school, but the college atmosphere has increased the number of difficult days.

“In high school, I would have the occasional breakdown maybe during midterms but it was never a normal occurrence,” Hakala said. “But in college, especially during freshman year, I felt like there was something new every week that was giving me a lot of anxiety.”

The Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at Penn State strive to reduce a lot of the stress and anxiety that students feel in college, providing hotlines, locations, and appointments for students to take advantage of at Penn State.

“We want to provide resources that help students feel empowered to help themselves,” said Kate Staley, a CAPS assistant director of outreach and community education.

While CAPS is there to provide a safe place for students to talk about what they’re struggling with, students believe it’s the lack of reassurance and support from professors that discourages students.

“Sometimes I feel stuck but I also don’t want to talk to my professors about it,” Hakala said. “I don’t want them to think I’m making an excuse because I wasn’t prepared.”

Matthew Hall, a sophomore at Penn State, also shares this reluctance to talk to a professor about what he’s struggling with.

“I know that college is supposed to be challenging and I don’t want my professors to think that I’m not cut out for this,” Hall said.

But with the rising number of college students that report experiencing a mental illness, some professors are more understanding with the difficulties students face in college.

“I have had students come to me expressing that they are having difficulty finishing their work on time, but when they do, I give them an extension with no questions asked,” said Dr. Robert Hume.

Dr. Hume has been teaching at universities for over 40 years and is currently an English professor at Penn State. He has dealt with students that have difficulty completing assignments. He says that students “already feel stressed about completing the work,” and questions why should he make them feel more stressed when they can’t get it in on time?

Similar to Hume, Ronald Redwing, a Materials Science professor at Penn State, said he “develops a plan” with each student based on the issues they are having.

“In general, whether physical or mental, I am looking at what care the student is receiving, and what is the plan for the near future in the class,” Redwing said.

Even with professors having a complete understanding of what college students go through and their willingness to help, many students are unaware of professors policies regarding mental health. Professors have sections in their syllabi that refer to disabilities but no real specifications on other health issues.

“I wish that professors would be more vocal with how they deal with mental health,” Hall said. “If I knew that they would understand and help ease my stress a little then I would consider talking to them about it.”

Hume has considered changing his syllabus in the future to include information about helping people who have other difficulties rather than just disabilities. He thinks it is important for “teachers to be proactive” when they know a student is struggling or even “prevent the stress from the start.”

Though the help from professors is a start to helping reduce mental illness throughout a college campus, students also need to keep track of themselves and stay healthy.

CAPS recently launched a new web-based program called WellTrack which is an online assessment that students can take to help them “understand the activities associated with when they feel better and worse and to identify patterns in their daily activities and how they are feeling,” according to a Penn State News story.

“By recognizing those patterns, students then feel empowered to change how they approach certain aspects of their daily lives,” Liz Toepfer, CAPS assistant director of Commonwealth Campuses, said in a Penn State News story.

With the recent data that has come out about mental illnesses throughout college, students are hoping to see a change in the future.

“I hope professors will become more open and understanding with students who have mental health issues,” Hall said. “It would really reduce my anxiety knowing that there is something I can do about it.”