

'Tis the season to be jolly?

by Andrew Watts

Stress and being a student go hand in hand. But this can be said for most occupations. Being a student now, however, can be particularly stressful.

The tough economic times have forced many people back to school. For the people who are well into their programs, though, the only certainty about finishing school is the diploma they will receive.

Today, many students are becoming very concerned over their future outside the university. After graduation there is no guarantee anyone will find a job. The combination of the normal rigours of academic life and the uncertain job picture on the outside have produced a much more stressful atmosphere here at the university. For the people who find it difficult to cope, they are susceptible to bouts of depression.

Depression is nothing new to nay university. Every university in the country offers some kind of counselling service to help students who are depressed. Here at the U of A the counselling services fall under the umbrella of Student Services. Student Services covers a wide range of facilities but one of the most used of its facilities is student counselling. Last year alone, some 6000 students passed through the counselling service. That figure represents almost a third of last year's total university population.

Granted, not everyone who approached counselling did so because they were under stress, depressed and in need of help. Many people use the service to receive career counselling, testing and advice on courses and faculties. But for those students who were and are in need of some help the service can be invaluable.

Depression has always been a major concern to the University as a whole. The original concept of 'Reading Week' reflects this.

Reading Week was first established in the academic year 72-73. At the time it was seen as a response to the rise in students seeking counselling around the end of January.

It was a way to relieve the February doldrums. Traditionally there has always been a rise in the amount of students who book counselling appointments around exam time in early December and late January. This year, however, has not seen that big jump. According to the director of Student Counselling, Dr. Allen Vanderwell, the number of counselling appointments this year overall is way up. Vanderwell feels this can be attributed to a number of things.

"First of all enrollment is up in record amounts but also many students are facing great uncertainty right now and they are now actively seeking out the counselling services,"

Vanderwell notes two levels of compensation: one is simply to try harder, but by doing so people tend to cut out many of the activities that they used to enjoy. They stop going out or playing any sports and they concentrate solely on their studies. This, however, leads usually to everything getting worse. At this point many students come in for counselling.

"Many students will approach us and ask help in resolving their problem, for those who don't, they can get better, fade out or withdraw into isolated bouts of depression," Vanderwell comments.

The short term object of counselling at this point is to try to get

The object of counselling is not to run the lives of the people who come in but to try to resolve the problem in a way that is best for them. No one tack is best for everybody.

Comments Vanderwell, "It is such an individual thing, there are so many variables involved."

There are quite a few really depressed students who use the counselling service but Vanderwell is quick to point out that this interpretation may be misleading.

"The temptation is to say yes (that a lot of very depressed students come in) but I think that they stand out so much."

The very depressed students may be referred to outside professional help. This is something that the counsellors won't hesitate to do.

"Whatever is best for the person," Vanderwell says.

But that referral service can work somewhat in reverse. Vanderwell points out that if health services on campus encounters a depressed in-

meet it. This does not mean that increased funding is required.

"We have to examine what we are doing and if the programs we are offering are contemporary to the eighties," continues Sartoris, "we may drop an unused program to relieve pressure elsewhere."

In this way, Sartoris and his staff hope to provide programs that are of a real need to students right now.

When a student enters counselling they receive no guarantee that they will be able to resolve their problems. But they can count on help and support. Counselling should not be seen solely as a crisis intervention centre either. It is there to aid students in a wide variety of areas. But for those students who are depressed and do want help over an extended period, they will get it. Vanderwell sums up the philosophy of Student Counselling, "Our long term objective is to get people functioning to the point where they don't need us anymore."



Vanderwell explains.

According to Vanderwell, being a student costs a great deal emotionally, physically and financially. But many of the problems students face are brought about by their own expectations of themselves. When work begins to pile up some students find they cannot cope as well as they feel they should. They immediately try to compensate for the extra workload but that is where their trouble could start.

the person doing something different. Injecting some variety into a person's routine is seen as a change for the better. Of course, Vanderwell admits that this tactic is not possible with everyone.

"We may have to try a different tack with some people because they may have already tried what we are prescribing," he says.

It is important for the counsellor to know what the person has already tried to do to relieve their problem.

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dividual they will quickly refer him or her to Student Counselling.

Traditionally, Student Services has been an area that does not receive a lot of attention. In times of economic restraint (such as now) student services can be given a low priority in terms of funding. That does not seem to be the case here.

The University of Alberta is not one to stint its funding to Student Services. The director of Student Services, Dean of Students, Dr. Paul Sartoris admits to not being able to expand the area but they have not been cutback either.

"We get a lot of support from the administration," says Sartoris.

Sartoris explains that the services offered are done so in an ebb and flow manner. If the need is seen to arise then a program is designed to

Recently, the Gateway reported on the suicide death of Kells Hall.

This report did not deal with the specific issue of suicides but rather took a broad perspective on the counselling services offered at the U of A.

On the next page is an interview, by Gateway reporter Jim Miller, discussing a suicide and its effect on people close to the victim.

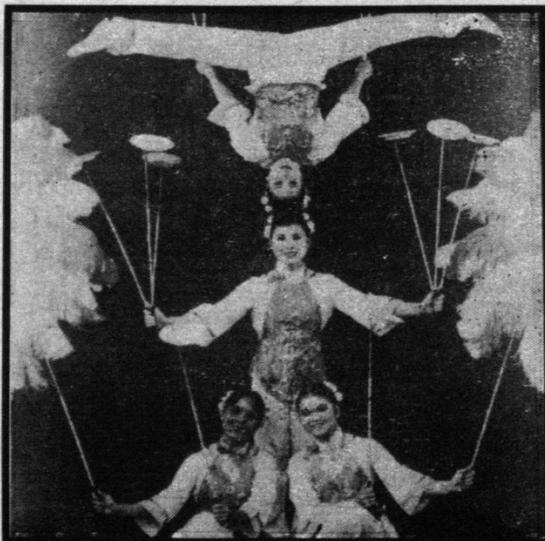
The person who is the subject of the interview was a U of A student.

The name of the person being interviewed was withheld at their request.

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