

A close-up photograph of a black graduation cap with a red ribbon tied around the rolled-up white diploma. The cap is resting on a stack of books. The background is dark and out of focus.

NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY: STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFERENCES

April 2025

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In October 2024, Hanover conducted an online survey of 1,020 college and university students ages 17 to 24 currently residing in the United States. The survey sought to gain insight into students' perceptions of their campus' climate, their perception of their mental health, contributing factors to their mental health, and their access to—and satisfaction with) mental health resources to provide a snapshot in time of students' mental health and well-being at higher education institutions. Read the [full survey analysis here](#).

This report explores the experiences and perceptions of respondents with learning differences, one segment of the surveyed population, as compared to peers without learning differences. For the purposes of this analysis, students with learning differences are those who responded “yes” to the question “Have you been diagnosed with any of the following: Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Auditory Processing Disorder (APD), Dyscalculia, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Intellectual Disability, Specific Learning Disorder, or Visual Processing Disorder (VPD)?”

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OVERVIEW: ALL STUDENTS

Mental health is a growing concern for college students, with a [survey from U.S. News and World Report](#) showing that as many as 70 percent of college students have struggled with mental health since enrolling. Based on Hanover's 2024 Student Mental Health Survey, **students' mental health and their perceptions of support have improved since 2023 but by small margins.** Just over half of all respondents rated their current mental health as positive in 2024, and only 48 percent report that their mental health has improved over the last 12 months.

Students who rate their mental health as poor primarily reported that it got worse during the past year, suggesting those facing difficulties need additional or different types of support than what is currently available to them.

More than half of students think their college supports their mental health, but students are generally unlikely to indicate that they will seek help through their college or university in the future. Institutions should consider outreach to their student populations to identify specific barriers to using campus resources, in keeping with [American Council on Education recommendations](#) for using data to assess student needs, institutional priorities, and progress.

2023

2024

Students who rate their current mental health and well-being as good or excellent

47%



52%

Students whose mental health and well-being improved over the past year

44%



48%

Students who are likely to seek mental health support from their college or university in the future

38%



49%

Students who agree their college or university is actively supportive of their mental health

63%



68%

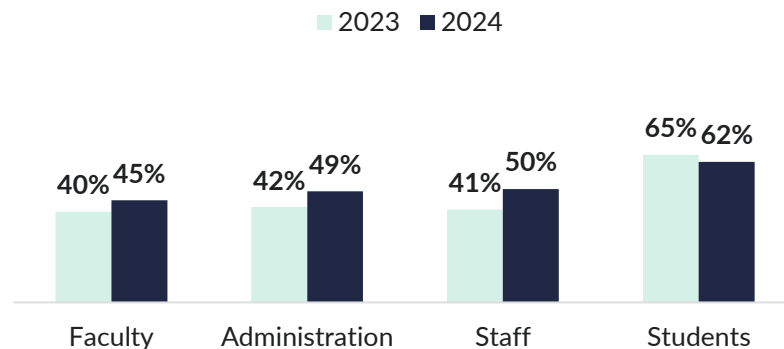
OVERVIEW: ALL STUDENTS

Institutions are gaining ground on supporting their students and fostering a positive environment, though there is room for improvement around the degree to which faculty and staff prioritize mental health and/or communicate these priorities to students. More respondents indicate that personnel prioritized students' mental health in 2024 compared to 2023, but still less than half think administrators and faculty view their mental health as a priority. Fellow students are viewed as the group that most prioritizes student mental health.

Trends are similar for with whom students feel they can discuss their mental health—more than half are comfortable with friends and outside counselors, but few are comfortable discussing it with non-teaching staff (34%) and faculty (40%). Unsurprisingly, students are less comfortable speaking with the general population of students than their personal friends (44% vs. 67%).

Students largely feel that their colleges' academic and social environments have a positive effect on their mental health. As with 2023, personal relationships have the most positive impact on students' mental health in 2024, while trauma has the most negative impact. Fewer students cite financial security as a negative factor compared to last year, but 39 percent still say it has a negative impact.

GROUPS RATED AS PRIORITIZING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH



POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

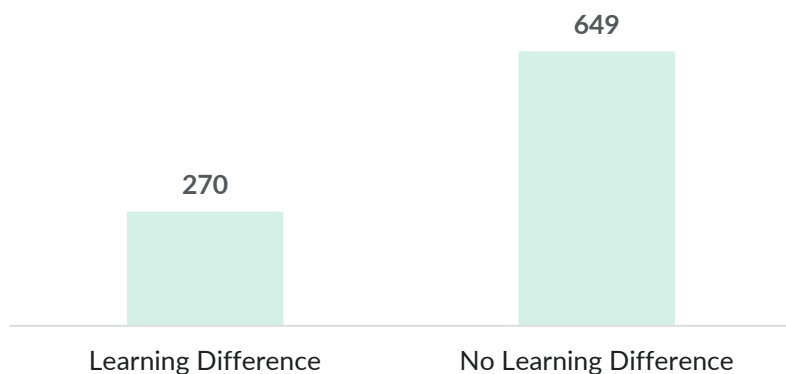


OVERVIEW: LEARNING DIFFERENCES

Hanover segmented responses to its mental health survey to understand the experiences and perceptions of students with diagnosed learning differences compared to their peers without such a diagnosis. These students may face unique challenges and need different support from their institutions. In our 2024 survey, 270 students identified as having a diagnosed learning difference. The remainder of this report focuses specifically on this population.

Based on the survey results, students with learning differences' overall mental health, major stressors, comfort discussing their mental health with different groups, and concerns about using institutional support services differ from students without learning differences (see right).

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS



Students with learning differences...



Report worse mental health



Experience more academic stress and disengagement, and feel stress management supports are insufficient



Are less comfortable discussing mental health with faculty, staff, and campus security



Use counseling services more



May avoid seeking support due to concerns about being judged or a lack of confidentiality



Doubt counseling centers can meet their needs and are more likely to have prior negative experiences there

SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFERENCES

There are various ways institutions can support students with learning differences. Colleges and universities have implemented both general services (e.g., career services) customized for neurodivergent students as well as unique targeted services, such as low sensory environments and support for executive functioning skills. Examples of several comprehensive programs are highlighted to the right.

EXAMPLE SERVICE TYPES

ACADEMIC SERVICES

- Orientations/ Summer Bridge Programs
- Tutoring
- Peer Mentoring
- Academic Advising/Coaching
- Specific Courses for College Readiness
- Assistive Technology Support
- Low Sensory Study Sessions
- Executive Functioning Skills



HEALTH AND WELLNESS

- Mental Health Counseling
- Animal-assisted Therapy
- Assistance Navigating Institutional Health and Wellness Initiatives
- Low Sensory Environments
- Staff with Specialized Training



SOCIAL SERVICES

- Social Coaching
- Small Group Events
- Living and Learning Communities
- Life Coaching
- Dating Boot Camps
- Low Sensory Events



CAREER SERVICES

- Career Coaching
- Career Exploration
- Career Strategies Courses
- Student Employment
- Internships



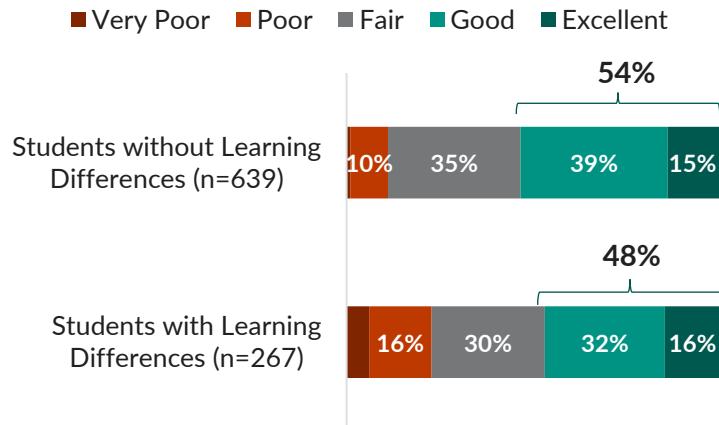
EXEMPLAR PROGRAMS

Institution	Program
Adelphi University	Bridges to Adelphi
Bradley University	Moss Scholars
Curry College	Program for Advancement of Learning (PAL)
	Social Achievement in Learning (SAIL)
Dean College	Arch Learning Community
	Engage Program
Loras College	Enhanced Program
	Autism Resources for Career in Higher Education Program (ARCH)
Marquette University	On Your Marg
Thomas More University	Institute for Learning Differences (ILD)

CURRENT MENTAL HEALTH AND RECENT CHALLENGES

Respondents with learning differences are more likely to report poor mental health. They are also more likely to feel overwhelmed by, and struggle with, academics and getting enough sleep. They often find stress management services inadequate (21% vs. 11% of peers without learning differences). Furthermore, these students are more likely to report issues accessing mental health support.

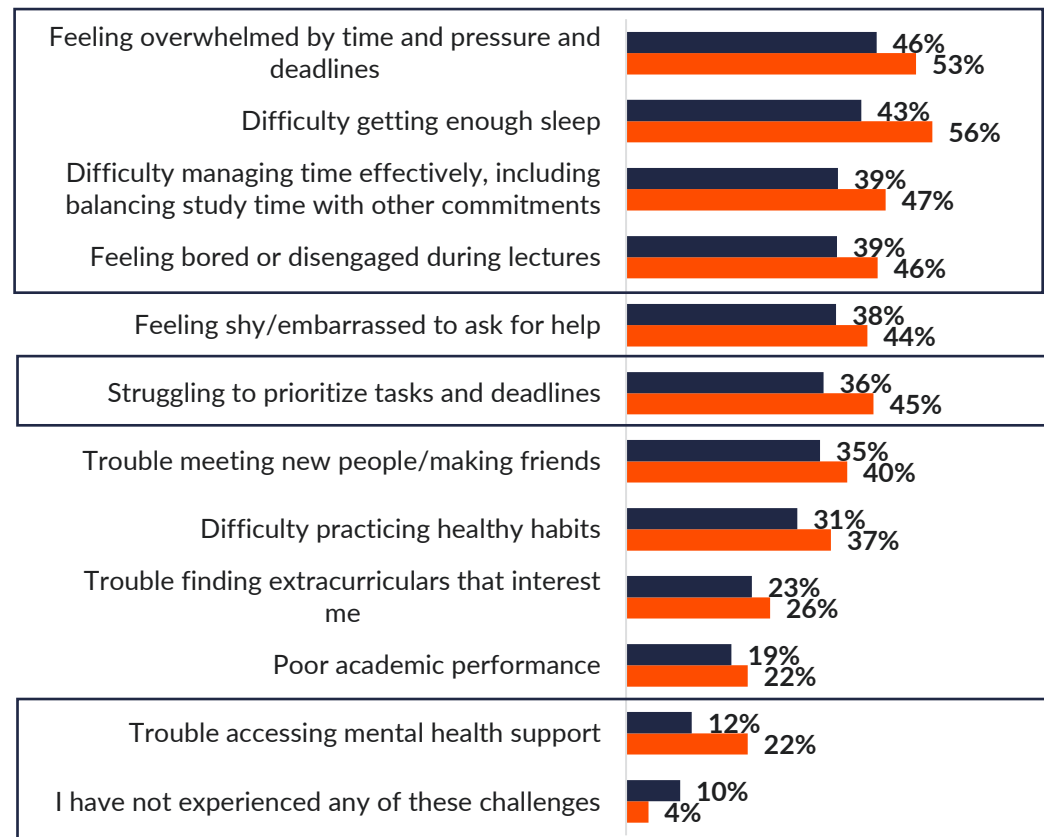
CURRENT OVERALL MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS IN THIS TERM

Percent of respondents reporting they experienced the following challenges during the current academic term

■ Students Without Learning Differences (n=639)
 ■ Students with Learning Differences (n=267)



TRUST AND COMFORT

With whom do you feel comfortable discussing your mental health?

34 percent

Faculty member

48 percent

Family members

64 percent

Friends



49 percent

College mental health counselors

35 percent

Non-teaching staff

45 percent

Other students

37 percent

Public safety/campus police

Students with learning differences are most comfortable discussing mental health with friends. They are warier about sharing with faculty and staff, including public safety officers or campus police.

In addition, they are less comfortable discussing their mental health with several key groups compared to peers without learning differences (see below).

Students with learning differences are less comfortable discussing their mental health with faculty (34% vs 45%), family (48% vs 56%), and college counselors (49% vs 59%).

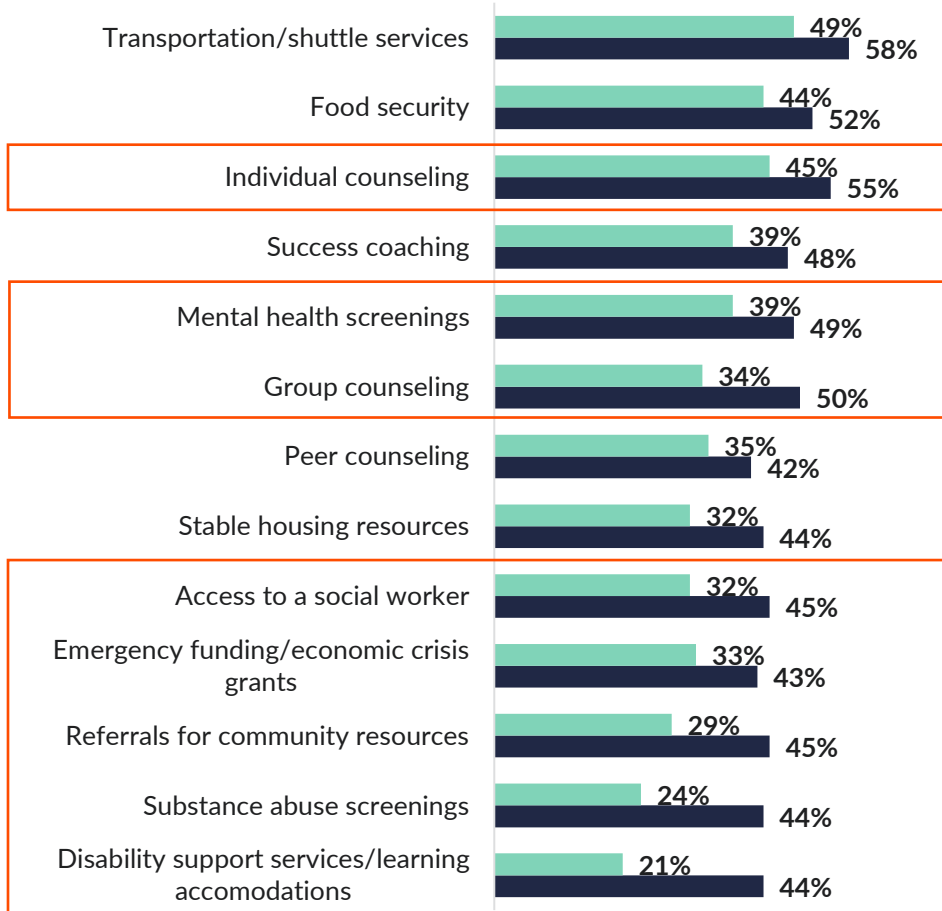
They are also more likely to feel “very uncomfortable” discussing mental health with campus safety personnel (23% vs 15%).

USE OF SERVICES

USED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Students responding "Yes" to "Have you used the following mental health resource(s)?"

■ No Learning Difference (n=294-422) ■ Learning Difference (n=124-202)



Students with learning differences are, unsurprisingly, more likely to use disability services including learning accommodations. However, **they are also more likely to use individual and group counseling, screenings, social workers, and referrals for community resources.** While more students with learning differences reported using peer counseling, the difference was not statistically significant. There also were no statistically significant differences in satisfaction with offered services between students with learning differences and students without learning differences.

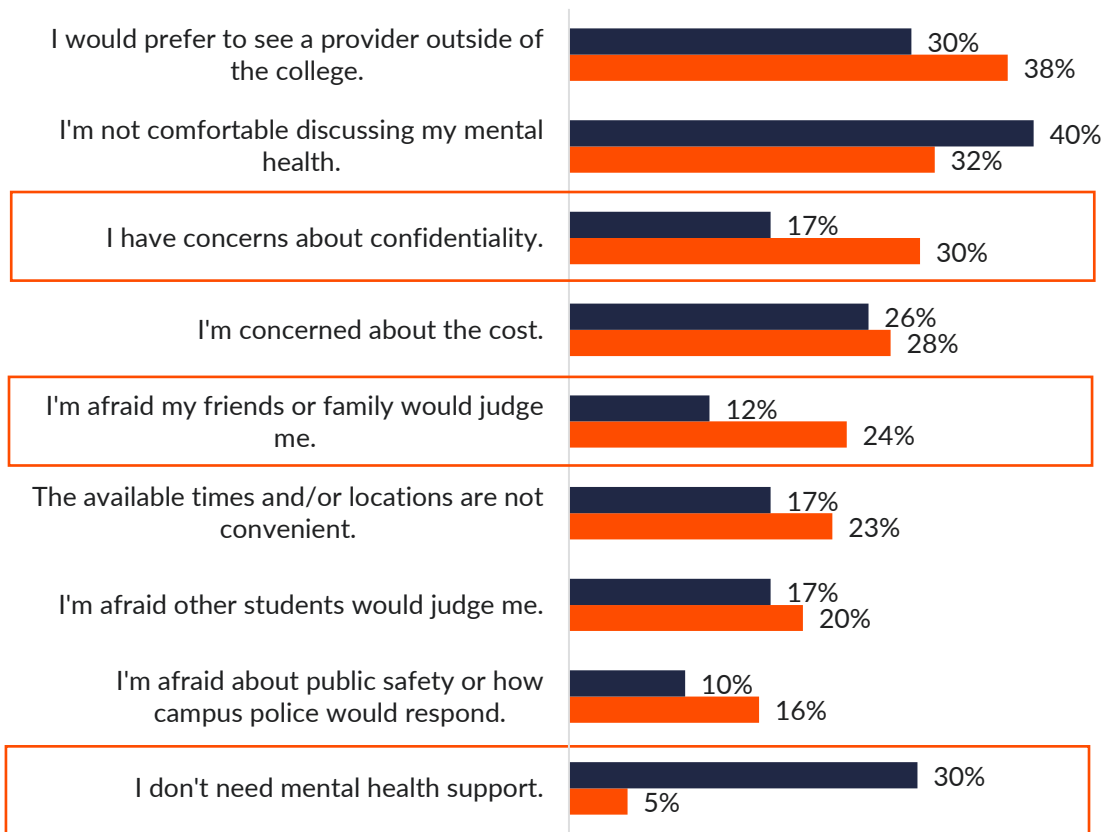
However, **21 percent of students with learning differences reported their colleges did not provide enough support for stress management,** compared to 11 percent of peers without learning differences. Given these students' greater negative impacts from academic stress and problems managing workload, institutions may wish to expand resources or better inform students with learning differences of offerings.

OBSTACLES TO SEEKING SUPPORT

REASONS TO NOT SEEK SUPPORT

Responses selected for the question "For which reasons would you be unlikely to seek mental health support from your college? Please select all that apply."

■ No Learning Difference (n=189) ■ Learning Difference (n=79)



Similar shares of students with and without learning differences are likely to seek help in the future (about half), but they differ in several key concerns. Respondents with learning differences **are more concerned about judgement and confidentiality**. More also say help is too expensive, but the reason for this difference is unclear.



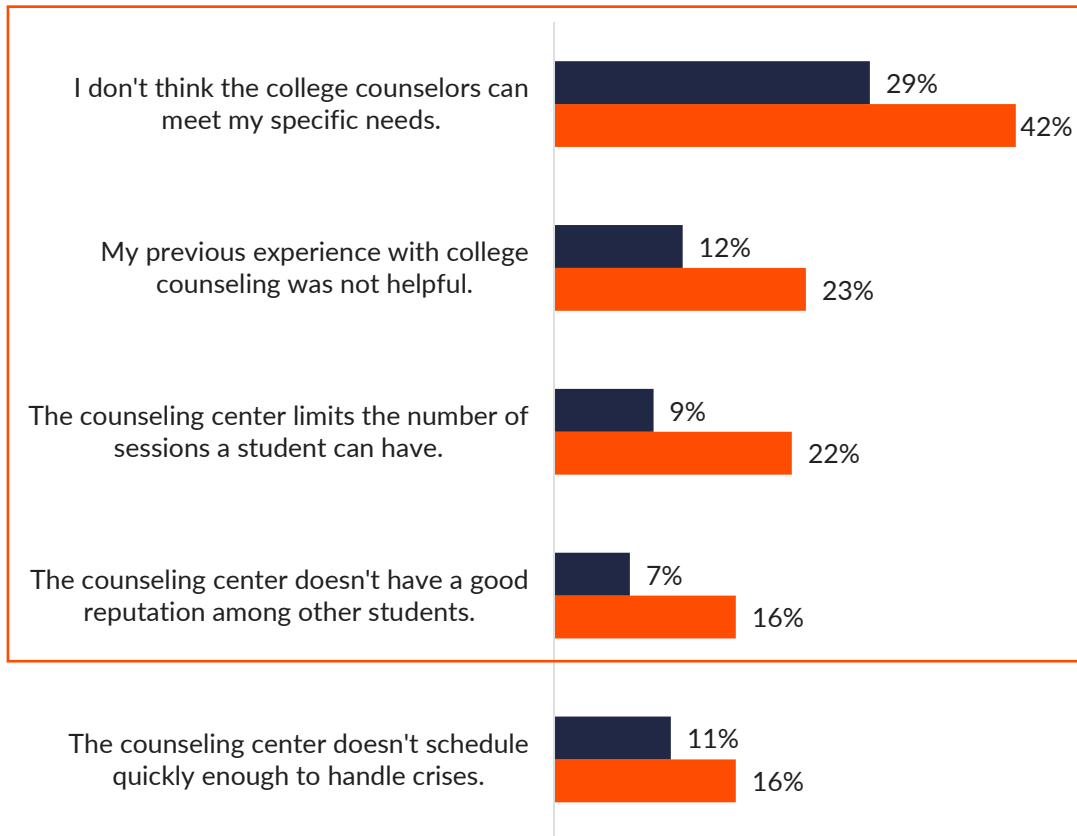
of students with learning differences think that seeking mental health assistance is **too expensive** (compared to 55% of students without learning differences)

OBSTACLES TO SEEKING COUNSELING SUPPORT

REASONS TO NOT SEEK SUPPORT

Responses from the question "For which reasons would you be unlikely to seek mental health support from your college? Please select all that apply."

■ No Learning Difference (n=189) ■ Learning Difference (n=79)



Students with learning differences experience more obstacles related to counseling support. Of reasons to avoid seeking counseling, four out of five show statistically significant differences between groups (shown in the box to the left).

More students with learning differences doubt that counselors can meet their needs, have had prior negative experiences, cite a poor reputation among students, and think the college offers too few counseling appointments.

