

UA must invest more in mental health

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The counseling center offers crisis intervention, psychological assessments as well as other services.

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life and in SGA. What is wrong, though, is getting so lost within these elements that we neglect an extremely crucial problem we have within our student body.

Throughout my four years here, I have woken up far too many times to hear about a student taking his or her own life. Most recently, I can remember a morning in March hearing about one student that rocked me to my core. Having struggled with depression myself, I ached for those whose mental state was so bad that suicide felt like their only option. In late March, a few friends and I started to form a student organization that has launched this fall called ACT (Alabama Cares Together). ACT's purpose is to create a community of students who can become comfortable sharing common struggles, whether it's by hanging out casually and building friendships or expressing difficulties openly to others. As college students, we all struggle with something. ACT seeks to help students struggling with everything from time-management skills and balancing a budget to social anxiety and depression.

This is my plea for The University of Alabama to wake up and take a stand.

It is not enough for students alone to be at the forefront of this. We must use our assets and resources to help our own who are struggling. Our counseling center has numerous counselors who are more than capable and do an excellent job in seeing our students. However, there is not nearly enough personnel. Coupled with that, these employees are severely underpaid and the counseling center building itself is underwhelming.

Just a short walk away sits the Mal Moore Athletic Facility. With a \$9.1 million renovation in 2013, it boasts state of the art jacuzzis, an extensive arcade and several other amenities available to our student athletes. We get at least an email a week about our next football game or "The Battle Plan." But how many emails have we gotten concerning mental health or "recognizing the signs" suicide prevention guidelines?

I understand that our athletic and academic budget is separate. However, this doesn't mean we should sit back and do little to nothing about the most important issue at the University: the well-being of our students. A portion of the athletic revenue should go into hiring more certified counselors as well as improving the counseling center's facilities and hours.

What do you think of when you think of The University of Alabama? Football? Greek life? Our SGA? An institution's reputation is based on what it chooses to prioritize. Whether we like it or not, we are perceived by outsiders as a school that puts football first and partying second. Don't get me wrong, we have an array of academic achievements, community service awards and other facets we consider first-class. What we lack completely is a real conversation regarding mental health.

There is nothing wrong with having a dominant football team, enormous greek community or strong SGA influence. I love football more than most and have friends who are involved in Greek

The SGA's Mental Health Awareness Week is not enough. Our student government should assemble more events for this topic, as well as lobby for increased funding to go towards the care of our students who are suffering internally. The Greek community, as well, should host more events similar to the ones they did during the You're Not Alone week last semester.

We can push for campus-wide reform all we want, but it starts with the individual student. I remember that even at my lowest, even a smile from another student walking past me would cheer me up. There is something special about the bond between our students. Reach out to those you think are struggling. Be genuine and sacrifice time, money, and effort to your fellow students. Most importantly, show unrelenting, unconditional love and support and be there at all times for those around you. It is your duty to this campus, and to humanity, to be as loving as possible to others so we don't experience the pain of seeing another martyr for this cause.

We get it, the rest of the country gets it: we are better at football than you and we are better at partying than you. Do we want to keep the status quo? Or do we want to maintain our traditions of football excellence, greek superiority, and sought-after SGA as we also strive to make a significant difference regarding mental health issues?

Lastly, if anyone reading this is struggling, please don't wait to contact someone. Tell a friend, your parents, go to the counseling center. You are so valued and so loved.

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