



Transitions RTC—<http://labs.umassmed.edu/transitionsRTC>

Transition Year—<http://transitionyear.org/>

The Niteo Program—<http://cpr.bu.edu/living-well/services/niteo-program>

Issue 38

focus

What is the Focus?

The *Focus* newsletter highlights important issues in mental health, providing timely information on a range of topics, including work-force development, supported education, organizational development and sustainability, peer-to-peer services, youth transition and system transformation. Have a suggestion for a topic? Let us know!



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New Models for Transition to Higher Education for Students with Mental Health Needs

According to statistics from the [Transitions RTC](http://labs.umassmed.edu/transitionsRTC) program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, as many as 86% of higher education students with mental health needs drop out of school. This is a stunning statistic, and colleges and universities have a major challenge to address in keeping their students on campus. Some schools have been successful in implementing supported education programs that integrate academic accommodations, counseling services and other supports to help students thrive in the higher education environment. Nonetheless, even the best supported education programs suffer some level of attrition, with intelligent, capable students leaving school because of a mental health issue.

It can be daunting enough for a typical student to find their own way forward when beginning their higher education career. For students with mental health needs coming to campus for the first time, there is an additional challenge in trying to be sufficiently prepared to stay well and flourish in a new environment. For a similar student returning to school after an absence, the need to account for the necessary supports, manage their own wellness, and take on academic coursework can be truly overwhelming. For both new and returning students with mental health needs, the responsibility they must bear in making decisions and managing their own situation can create a tremendous barrier to success. Two new programs, one on campus, and one online, are seeking to prepare students to overcome those barriers.

The Niteo Program

A unique [new program at Boston University](#) is attempting to make the transition back onto campus a bit more manageable for returning students. The program, called Niteo, is a non-residential, two-semester stand-alone program that helps students from any college or university to transition back into school. Here's how Boston University's Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation describes it:

The Niteo Program assists students living with serious mental health challenges to develop the health, resiliency skills, and support they need to reengage successfully at college and complete higher education. Students work with college coaches who provide intensive coordination and planning to assist students in returning to college, focusing on cognitive remediation, mindfulness, stress-hardiness, wellness, management, social connections, and academic skills.

The program entails two semesters of work. The first semester consist of individualized case management and two days of classes per week. The second semester includes "follow-along services to ensure successful school reentry and coordination of on-campus services." Throughout the process, the focus is on "individualized, intensive coaching and assistance to aid students with the integration of necessary treatment and academic resources." There is a strong emphasis on wellness and resiliency, with students developing wellness plans that include their physical health, and group courses that help students develop coping methods and social connections.

The advantage of the Niteo approach is that it is quite intensive, with students receiving comprehensive support over the course of two full semesters. Although it is located at Boston University, it is open to any student, with plans to attend any institution. Of course, it would be challenging for a student residing outside of the Boston area to participate, and there is also tuition required, with the Fall 2014 semester costing \$5,000.



Transition Year

Another resource for students that are transitioning into higher education, either as new or returning students, is the [Jed Foundation "Transition Year"](#) program. (Jed Foundation is an organization that exists "to promote emotional health and prevent suicide among college and university students." See more at jedfoundation.org.) Whereas the Niteo Program offers two semesters of face-to-face instruction and support, the Transition Year program offers an online toolkit that can help students to plan for their transition to higher education. It includes resources such as "interactive tools that help families consider emotional health when selecting a college, campus-specific information on mental health and wellness resources, articles and checklists for parents and students, advice on differentiating between manageable emotional challenges and po-

tentially larger problems and specific information and resources for families of students with a diagnosed mental health condition.”

While Transition Year does not match the intensity of a campus-based program like Niteo, it has the advantage of being completely free, and available to students located anywhere throughout the country. Although it does not involve personal instruction, the site does allow visitors to create an account and participate in online forums for peer-to-peer connection. Registered users can also complete and store interactive forms for prospective colleges. Another unique feature is that the site offers two parallel experiences: one for students, and a second for parents. Finally, the ability to learn about specific schools through a “college wiki” function is potentially very useful.



The Future of College Transition

As colleges and universities, families, students and other stakeholders grow to understand the important role of transition services in successfully integrating students with mental health needs on campus, it is likely that new models to support those transitions will emerge. With a significant percentage of students with mental health issues leaving school, it’s clear that the supports currently in place are not sufficient to help the majority of students succeed. It is possible that more institutions may develop programs like Niteo, to help students build the wellness skills and resiliency they need to enter, or re-enter, college life. It is also possible that new online resources to prepare students with mental health needs to adapt to college life will come about.

These programs and resources may come from colleges and universities, or they may be free-standing. However, whatever shape they take, it is clear that the need for transition and re-entry supports must be fulfilled, in order to stem the tide of drop outs among students with mental health needs, so those students to attain the same benefits that their typical peers enjoy as a result of participating in higher education.



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