



2018

# Mental Health First Aid Training for VCU Faculty and Staff

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## MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING FOR VCU FACULTY AND STAFF

### TEAM MEMBERS

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Kendra Gerlach, Director, Marketing and Communications, College of Engineering  
Cristen Jandreau, Assistant Director, Office of Research Integrity and Ethics  
Jennifer Lee, Assistant Director for Tutoring Services, Campus Learning Center, Student Success  
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Jennifer Tennison, Coordinator, Enrolled Student Services, Graduate School  
Peter Uetz, Associate Professor, Life Sciences

*Project Sponsor: Michelle Schmitt, Assistant Professor and Director of the Center for School-Community Collaboration, School of Education*

### PROJECT ABSTRACT

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)<sup>1</sup>, an international training program, teaches participants to notice and support individuals experiencing a mental health or substance use issue and connects them to appropriate resources. While resources exist for students, this project aims to implement MHFA as a professional development opportunity for VCU faculty and staff. A successful pilot training held this summer demonstrates the need and desire for training in the VCU community. Evidence<sup>2</sup> shows mental health issues lead to absenteeism, employee turnover and increased healthcare costs, costing organizations billions in recruitment that may have been avoided. Through state partnerships, trainers are available to offer this one-day program multiple times a year.

### QUEST CONNECTIONS

This team project cuts across two strategic plans as the university phases out its existing plan and moves forward into its new plan.

Quest for Distinction	Quest 2025: Together We Transform
Theme I: Become a leader among national research universities in providing all students with high-quality learning/living experiences focused on inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global environment.	Theme IV: Diversity Driving Excellence – Translate our value philosophy of diversity and inclusion into practices related to excellence and success
Goal I.D: Recruit and retain faculty, staff, and senior leadership with the skills and talents to increase quality teaching and learning, high impact research, and diversity at all levels	Goal 1: Advance institutional excellence through a commitment to diversity, inclusion and equity fostered through a culture of appreciation and respect

In addition to meeting the criteria within the Quest for Distinction, MHFA also fits within the VCU Strategic Plan 2025: Together We Transform. This plan includes Theme IV, Diversity Driving Excellence. MHFA would help to meet this theme, which aims to cultivate a culture of

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/amymorin/2017/02/16/1-in-5-employees-has-a-mental-health-problem-heres-what-business-leaders-can-do-about-it/#4d32ae9538b8>

appreciation, by furthering a community of inclusion and providing help to those who may need it.

## **PROJECT GOALS**

- Provide faculty and staff with skills to be more confident in their abilities to recognize and provide appropriate support for a person having mental health difficulties.
- Empower faculty and staff to support each other as well as students who may seek them out during times of high stress.

A considerable amount of research has been conducted on the impact and prevalence of mental illness in the general public as well as in academic settings. One in five American adults will experience a mental illness in a given year, according to the National Alliance on Mental Health ("Any Mental Illness Among Adults", 2015). According to the Center for Prevention and Health, mental health issues cost employers between \$79 billion and \$100 billion each year as employees are absent from their jobs, not as focused, or leave the organization altogether (Finch, 2005).

Based on a sample of over 14,000 university employees, a 2013 study revealed growing stress levels among academics prompted by heavy workloads, a 'long hours' work culture, and conflicting management demands. In fact, academics were found to experience higher stress than those in the wider population (Kinman & Wray, 2013). Another study found that 43% of academic staff exhibited symptoms of at least a mild mental disorder; this is nearly twice the prevalence of mental disorders compared with the general population (Gorczynski, Hill, & Rathod, 2017). A 2014 study of depression, stress, and anxiety among non-tenure-track faculty members produced a striking and telling result: the more committed they were to their institution, the more stressed, depressed, and anxious they felt. That result, the report's authors hypothesized, may be the product of faculty members' "feeling commitment to an organization that fails to reciprocate" (Reevy & Deeson, 2014).

Another goal of the MHFA program is to teach lay people methods of assisting someone who may be in a mental health crisis, in the early stages of developing a mental health problem, or in need assistance with a mental disorder. This project aims to implement MHFA as a professional development opportunity for VCU faculty and staff in order to equip members of the VCU community to better assist those who may be experiencing a mental health crisis and to understand when and how to provide self-care when needed.

## **PROJECT STRATEGIES**

To accomplish this project, the team offered a MHFA training session at VCU, with the rationale that it would 1) aid in assessing the level of interest in MHFA as a professional development opportunity at VCU, 2) determine feasibility of offering MHFA at VCU with firsthand experience, and 3) generate data regarding participant's opinions on multiple facets of MHFA, including anticipated supervisor support and professional development appropriateness.

A VCU pilot training session for MHFA was held on August 1, 2018, in BioTech One. The pilot session was advertised in the TelegRAM twice over the summer (June 26 and July 17). Within three hours of the first ad sent in the TelegRAM, all 30 available spots in the session were filled. A total of 89 people signed up for the session, and 59 remain on a waitlist. The registration was done on a first-come, first-served basis using a Google form. Additional recruitment methods (including targeted emails to departments, emails through existing departmental list serves, and other university announcement systems) were ultimately not utilized due to the strong response after the first TelegRAM announcement.

The pilot session, like all MHFA trainings, was 8 hours long, with a 30-minute break for lunch. Two certified instructors, Michelle Schmidt and Layne Mitchell, led the training. The course offered participants information on mental health issues ranging from substance abuse, depression, and anxiety, to psychosis, such as schizophrenia. It also equipped participants with strategies to help those living with mental health problem in the case of an emergency or crisis.

Over 50 different departments are represented on the registration list, with 63% being VCU staff, 33% VCU faculty, and 4% VCU health system employees. A survey was given to participants after the training concluded and are described below (Outcomes). Survey questions and detailed results are included as appendices.

## **ACTION STEPS**

- Researched the need for mental health-focused training in an academic environment.
- Identified and engaged a VCU staff member who is a MHFA trainer and familiar with the program.
- Determined the best method to gauge MHFA interest level of faculty and staff (i.e. a pilot program).
- Acquired feedback on suggested pilot marketing language from relevant stakeholders.
- Determined optimal advertising strategies .
- Developed participant survey questions tailored to assessing anticipated supervisor support and professional development appropriateness.
- Identified individuals to facilitate the training.
- Secured a space on-campus for the training.
- Advertised the training and maintained a waiting list of interested participants.
- Reminded participants of training details closer to actual date.
- Hosted a pilot training at VCU and collected participant feedback.
- Analyzed participant feedback to plan for implementation and sustainability (e.g. identify a VCU department that will “house” the program moving forward).

## **OUTCOMES**

There are various anticipated outcomes associated with the addition of the MHFA program to VCU's current roster of professional development opportunities for faculty and staff. Immediate outcomes include reduced stigma for mental health issues as well as increased knowledge and skills to assist a person who may be dealing with a mental health problem or crisis until the appropriate professionals can help. According to the survey given to program participants following the VCU pilot training program, 95% of respondents (24 responses out of 29 program participants) felt that they could recognize and correct misconceptions about mental health and mental illness. Further, 95% of respondents felt more confident that they could assist a person who may be dealing with a mental health problem or crisis to seek professional help.

Long term, the anticipated outcomes of the training are increased employee satisfaction and productivity by creating a healthier work environment, increased referrals to the Employee Assistance Program, and increased employee retention. According to the survey, 95% of respondents agreed that this program helps to develop a university-wide culture of appreciation by creating a more empathetic employee body and 63% agreed that this program would help to retain faculty/staff. 100% of the survey respondents agreed that this program would be a valuable addition to VCU's professional development opportunities and would recommend others to complete the training.

This program fills a gap in VCU's professional development offerings as there are no similar training programs currently available to VCU employees. As illustrated by the registration list, there is a demonstrated interest in bringing this training program to VCU.

## SUSTAINABILITY

Several VCU offices focus on mental health; however, many of them serve the student population. Since this program targets VCU employees (i.e. faculty and staff), the most appropriate department to house the training would be VCU Human Resources (Recruitment & Retention). A training event could be held three times per year: fall, spring, and summer semesters.

Ultimately, a point person should be established who would advertise and coordinate logistics for the training events, including securing trainers through state resources, securing a meeting space able to accommodate 30 participants, and overseeing registration following the advertisements.

## FINANCING AND RESOURCES

The Virginia General Assembly allocated funds for MHFA training and associated costs under former Governor McDonnell. That funding currently covers Mike Olsen's position as the Suicide Prevention & MHFA Program Coordinator at the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) as well as the cost of manuals and to get trainers trained (M. Schmitt, personal communication, September 7, 2018). Due to the fact that this funding is a state resource, VCU can obtain 60-90 manuals for free to facilitate 2-3 trainings each year, as long as the funding remains unused and available. Currently, Michelle Schmitt is the only MHFA trainer on staff at VCU, so VCU could request seats in a future training so that she is not the only MHFA trainer on staff.

This project would only require financial support from VCU if the General Assembly funds are spent and no longer available. If that were the case, the largest *required* expense is the cost of the manuals at \$480. In that scenario, the optional cost of providing breakfast/snacks could be eliminated to bring the total cost per training to \$755.

Below is a project budget that takes into account cost with and without state funds. The column to the far right is based on figures obtained from the MHFA site, which assumes a maximum class size of 30 participants and a full course led by two facilitators.

## PROJECT BUDGET

Item Description		Justification	Cost with state funds (per training)	Cost without state funds (per training)
1	Instructor certification cost	Funds currently available to train additional VCU-based instructors	\$0	\$0
2	Administrative/coordination fee	Done in-house with VCU HR	\$0	\$0
3	Instructor travel & per diem	\$0.55/mile reimbursement for auto use, \$50/day per diem for one day	\$0	\$172
4	MHFA manuals	\$16/person, including shipping	\$0	\$480
5	Program supplies	Art supplies, name tags, miscellaneous handouts	\$0	\$75

Item Description		Justification	Cost with state funds (per training)	Cost without state funds (per training)
6	Printing	Printing of handouts & certificates for course - up to 200 pages	\$0	\$28
7	Lodging	VA Community Service Boards have more than a dozen MHFA instructors within a 50 mile radius of VCU	\$0	\$0
8	Room Rental	VCU has spaces available to reserve for free on both campuses	\$0	\$0
9	Audio/Visual Equipment	Included with room reservation space	\$0	\$0
10	Breakfast/snacks	\$5/person/day for one day + 10% admin fee	\$176 (optional)	\$176 (optional)
11	Lunch	Optional	-	-
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$176</b>	<b>\$931</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendation of the team is for VCU to adopt this program as a part of the professional development opportunities that are available to faculty and staff. MHFA would meet the goals of the university to retain faculty and staff, as well as provide a positive working and learning environment for members of the VCU community. Adopting this program would help VCU to gain a national reputation by being a proactive leader in supporting not only student mental health but also supporting mental wellness for faculty and staff. As a next step, the program should be presented to VCU Human Resources (HR). The training program seems to be a natural fit for HR administration and oversight due to their aims of enhancing work life for faculty and staff at VCU and recruiting and retaining quality faculty and staff members. An individual in this department would be charged with marketing the training sessions, scheduling two instructors for the session, and finding a room on campus.

The only barrier that the team sees in bringing MHFA to VCU as a professional development opportunity would be finding a department or organization on campus willing to oversee the program. There is a natural partner in the community with whom VCU can align to provide instructors for the two to three trainings the team is suggesting per year and there are funds to instruct more VCU-based trainers. As communicated in the project budget provided, there is little to no cost to VCU for providing this opportunity for faculty and staff. The only cost that VCU would incur would be if snacks/refreshments were provided at the training.

Implementation of this program is one that the team sees as quite simple based on the pilot offering of MHFA at VCU in August. It would simply take a VCU department adopting it as part of their professional development offerings and handling the subsequent logistics, including

reserving a room on either campus, securing trainers, and advertising the training (e.g. VCU TelegRAM for faculty and staff, the HR training site, etc.).

## FINAL PITCH

Mental health is a serious issue in academia. Some 40 percent of graduate students experience anxiety and/or depression (Evans, 2018). Faculty and staff experience increasing stress levels due to heavy workloads, long hours, and many administrative demands. Supervisors need training to recognize these issues and to learn techniques for early intervention to support a person in need until mental health professionals can take over.

MHFA is to mental health what CPR is to heart attacks – a way to train lay people to recognize and respond until health professionals can arrive.

Strong response to minimal advertising for the pilot program held this summer indicates great interest among VCU faculty and staff in this program. The program was advertised in July and held in August, a time when the fewest people are on campus, yet all seats were full within three hours and the number of respondents who remain on the waiting list is enough to fill an entire year's worth of suggested trainings.

A survey was conducted after the pilot program. One hundred percent of respondents agreed that this training program would be a valuable addition to professional development for faculty and staff and 100 % of survey respondents would recommend the course to others.

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## **Mental Health First Aid: VCU Pilot Survey Results**

1. This training program should be offered regularly at VCU.
  - 12.5% Agree
  - 87.5% Strong Agree
2. If offered regularly at VCU, this training program would be a valuable addition to the current roster of professional development opportunities available for faculty and staff.
  - 16.67% Agree
  - 83.33% Strongly Agree
3. This training program helps VCU achieve Theme IV of Quest 2025 - Diversity Driving Excellence: Translate our value philosophy of diversity and inclusion into practices related to excellence and success.
  - 12.5% Uncertain
  - 20.83% Agree
  - 66.67% Strongly Agree
4. This training program helps to develop a university-wide culture of appreciation that is reflected in day-to-day behaviors, activities, and campus life that is expected of all academic and administrative units.
  - 4.17% Uncertain
  - 29.17% Agree
  - 66.67% Strongly Agree
5. This training program helps to recruit and/or retain faculty and staff.
  - 4.17% Strongly Disagree
  - 33.33% Uncertain
  - 20.83% Agree
  - 41.67% Strongly Agree

# MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

## 8hr Course Evaluation Form

Location of the MHFA course: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Dates of MHFA course: \_\_\_\_\_  
 MHFA Instructor(s): \_\_\_\_\_

### I. Overall Course Evaluation

		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
1.	Course goals were clearly communicated. (n=24)	4.2%	4.2%	0.0%	33.3%	58.3%
2.	Course goals & objectives were achieved. (n=24)	4.2%	0.0%	8.3%	41.7%	45.8%
3.	Course content was practical and easy to understand. (n=24)	4.2%	0.0%	4.2%	37.5%	54.2%
4.	There was adequate opportunity to practice the skills learned. (n=24)	4.2%	4.2%	12.5%	54.2%	25.0%

### II. A. Presenter Evaluation: Instructor Michelle Schmitt

		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
5.	The Instructor's presentation skills were engaging and approachable. (n)=23	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	26.1%	69.9%
6.	The Instructor demonstrated knowledge of the material presented. (n)=23	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	26.1%	73.9%
7.	The Instructor facilitated activities and discussion in a clear and effective manner. (n)=23	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	30.4%	69.6%
8.	Feedback for <u>this</u> Instructor?					

### III. B. Presenter Evaluation: Instructor Layne Mitchell (Leave blank if only one instructor)

		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
9.	The Instructor's presentation skills were engaging and approachable. (n)=22	0.0%	0.0%	9.1%	50.0%	40.9%
10.	The Instructor demonstrated knowledge of the material presented. (n)=21	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%	33.3%	61.9%
11.	The Instructor facilitated activities and discussion in a clear and effective manner. (n)=22	0.0%	0.0%	4.5%	50.0%	45.5%
12.	Feedback for <u>this</u> Instructor?					

### III. Practical Application

	<b>As a result of this training, I feel more confident that I can...</b>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
13.	Recognize the signs that someone may be dealing with a mental health problem or crisis. (n)=23	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	56.5%	43.5%
14.	Reach out to someone who may be dealing with a mental health problem or crisis. (n)=23	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	47.8%	47.8%
15.	Ask a person whether s/he is considering killing her/himself. (n)=23	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	47.8%	47.8%

Over please →

16.	Actively and compassionately listen to someone in distress. (n)=23	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	43.5%	56.5%
17.	Offer a distressed person basic “first aid” level information and reassurance about mental health problems. (n)=23	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	43.5%	56.5%
18.	Assist a person who may be dealing with a mental health problem or crisis to seek professional help. (n)=22	0.0%	0.0%	4.5%	31.8%	63.6%
19.	Assist a person who may be dealing with a mental health problem or crisis to connect with community, peer, and personal supports (n)=21	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%	33.3%	61.9%
20.	Be aware of my own views and feelings about mental health problems and disorders. (n)=21	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	28.6%	71.4%
21.	Recognize and correct misconceptions about mental health and mental illness as I encounter them. (n)=21	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%	28.6%	66.7%

## 22. What is your overall response to this course? (n)=17

Primary Theme: Course Content- Positive

Sample quote: *“This course was fantastic and engaging. The material was useful and practical, and I am very glad that this was offered as an option for VCU employee”*

Subthemes: Informative content, Engaging and dynamic experience, useful content

Primary Theme: Course Content- Recommended Improvements

Sample Quote: *“A lot of information, with not enough breaks in between”*

Subthemes: Information overload, Diagnostics overload

Primary Theme: Event Logistics

Sample quote: *“A lot of information, with not enough breaks in between”*

## 23. What do you consider to be the strengths of the course? (n)=17

Primary Theme: Course Content Strengths

Sample quote: *“The Action Plan gives me a structure. And the repetition of the Action Plan throughout the day stressed its importance. I think I was already doing much of what it outlines, but the organization is reassuring and helpful. I did find some of the risk factors to suicide to be new information and the experiential exercise on Psychosis as well as the video clip were powerful.”*

Subthemes: action plan provided structure, experiential Exercises, user friendly content, acquired new knowledge, preparation, dismantling mental health stigma, meaningful engagement

Primary Theme: Course Instructor Strengths

Sample Quote: *“The presenters were very thorough and knowledgeable”*

Subthemes: Depth of knowledge

**24. What do you consider to be the weaknesses of the course? (n)=16**

Primary Theme: Course Content-Improvements

Sample Quote: *"Too much material to cover within the short time frame. No time for participant role plays to reinforce what we were learning, especially active listening applied to someone in crisis."*

Subthemes: content overload for timeframe, relative course materials and information, repetitive content, more experiential exercises, inclusion of additional content, understanding aftermath

Primary Theme: Event Logistics

Subthemes: session length, room environment

**25. Was there any issue/topic you expected this course to cover which it did not address? (n)=12**

Primary Theme: Request for Additional Content

Sample Quote: *"Discussing the potential long term negative impacts and how to best minimize them (regarding employment). While this was discussed somewhat, I feel it should be more prominently featured when the audience is employees interactions with other employees. This concern is probably one of the biggest hurdles to those with good health insurance seeking help, in my opinion. Regardless of the outcome or intent, the rumor mill tends to be brutal on those who have diagnosed mental health issues."*

Subthemes: Inclusion of additional content, VCU-specific context, life's uncertainties, and long-term consequences

<b>26. How did you hear about this course? (circle all that apply)</b> (n)=22			
<b>a.</b>	My employer asked/assigned me:	9.1%	<b>f.</b> A newsletter/bulletin <i>which one?:</i> 13.6%
<b>b.</b>	Word of mouth, not employer <i>who?:</i>	9.1%	<b>g.</b> Radio <i>station?:</i> 0.0%
<b>c.</b>	A website <i>which site?:</i>	4.5%	<b>h.</b> Newspaper <i>which paper?:</i> 0.0%
<b>d.</b>	Email notice <i>from whom?</i>	54.5%	<b>i.</b> TV <i>station?:</i> 0.0%
<b>e.</b>	Flier or brochure <i>where obtained?:</i>	0.0%	<b>j.</b> Other: 18.2%

**27. Would you recommend this course to others? (n)=22** 100% Yes 0.0% No

**28. What is your gender? (n)=21** 9.5% Male 90.5% Female

<b>29. How do you describe your race / ethnicity? (Please circle all that apply)</b> (n)=21			
<b>a.</b>	American Indian or Alaskan Native:	0.0%	<b>e.</b> Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander: 0.0%
<b>b.</b>	Asian:	4.8%	<b>f.</b> Caucasian / White: 66.7%
<b>c.</b>	Black or African American:	14.3%	<b>g.</b> Other: 9.5%
<b>d.</b>	Hispanic or Latino origin:	14.3%	

<b>30. What is your age?</b> (n)=20					
<b>a.</b>	16-24 years:	<b>b.</b>	25-44 years:	<b>c.</b>	45-60 years:
	0.0%		65.0%		15.0%
				<b>d.</b>	61-80 years:
					20.0%
				<b>e.</b>	81 years or older:
					0.0%



## Mental Health First Aid Training for VCU Faculty & Staff

GEHLI 2018 Project  
Team 2



## Agenda

- Team member introduction
- Introduction to Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training
- Mental health research findings
- Why MHFA?
- Project Goals
- Commonwealth of VA & the MHFA program
- MHFA Pilot at VCU
- Project Outcomes
- VCU Quest
- Sustainability, Financing, & Resources
- Recommendations



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## Our Team

- **Roy Brown**, Research and Education Librarian, VCU Libraries
- **Kendra Gerlach**, Director, Marketing and Communications, College of Engineering
- **Cristen Jandreau**, Assistant Director, Office of Research Integrity and Ethics
- **Jennifer Lee**, Assistant Director, Campus Learning Center, Student Success
- **Anne Massey**, Director, Sponsored Projects and Program Planning, Office of Health Innovation
- **Jennifer Tennison**, Coordinator, Enrolled Student Services, Graduate School
- **Peter Uetz**, Associate Professor, Life Sciences

**Project Sponsor: Michelle Schmitt,**  
*Assistant Professor and Director of the Center for School-Community Collaboration*



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## What is MHFA?

MHFA = **Mental Health First Aid**

- 8-hour course
- teaches participants how to **identify, understand and respond** to signs of **mental illness, substance abuse, or crisis**
- teaches the skills to reach out and provide **initial help and support** to someone in need
- **decreases** the **stigma** surrounding mental health illness



<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/about/>

[MHFA advertisement video](#)  
(produced by the state of Michigan)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7R2j-gxPePE>



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## Who are MHF Aiders?

- Teachers, first responders, and veterans
- Neighbors, parents, and friends
- Anyone supporting a family member
- First Ladies and Mayors
- Anyone who wants to make their community healthier, happier, and safer

*Everyone can be a first aider!*



<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/about/>

## What MHFA is \*not\*

- Acting as a counselor or physician
- Being held responsible or liable (for an outcome in the event you help)
- Diagnosing mental health disorders



<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/about/>

## MHFA By the Numbers

- More than 1 million people trained (US)
- More than 12,000 Instructors

States with the most people trained

California	52,637
Pennsylvania	44,704
Texas	33,468
Michigan	27,728
Missouri	25,391



<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/about/>

## In the News



## Research Findings – General Population

- **One in five** American adults suffers from a mental illness in a given year, according to the National Alliance on Mental Health ("Any Mental Illness Among Adults", 2015).
- According to the Center for Prevention and Health, mental health issues cost employers between **\$79 billion and \$100 billion** each year as employees are absent from their jobs, not as focused, or leave the organization altogether (Finch, 2005).

## Research Findings – Academic Settings

- Based on a sample of over 14,000 university employees, a 2013 study revealed **growing stress levels among academics prompted by heavy workloads, a 'long hours' work culture, and conflicting management demands. Academics experience higher stress than those in the wider population.** (Kinman & Wray, 2013).
- **43%** of academic staff exhibited symptoms of at least a mild mental disorder. This is nearly twice the prevalence of mental disorders compared with the general population (Gorcynski, Hill, & Rathod, 2017).

## Why MHFA is Important for VCU

- **VCU = Student Focused Learning Community**
  - VCU Counseling Services
  - Housing / Student Life
- **Mental Health Services for Faculty Staff**
  - Workshops: Mindfulness, Stress Reduction, etc.
  - Employee Assistance Program (EAP) - 3 visits covered by insurance

### Mental Health Issues in the Workplace

- Increased Absenteeism
- Employee Turnover
- Increased Health Care Costs
- Increased Recruitment Costs to Address Turnover



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## Project Goals

1. Provide a professional development opportunity for VCU faculty and staff to receive MHFA training.
2. Equip members of the VCU Community to better assist those who may be living with mental health crisis and also provide care to self.
3. Seek to enhance national reputation due to VCU's proactive leadership in supporting not only student mental health, but also in supporting mental wellness for faculty and staff.



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## Commonwealth of Virginia & MHFA

- **Line item in state budget since Governor McDonnell**
  - Michael Olsen – MHFA State Program Coordinator
    - Virginia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Services
  - Fund training through Community Service Boards (CSB)
- **Trainers must facilitate 2 trainings each year for certification**
- **Trainings held throughout the year (example of upcoming course options included below)**
- **Free to attend**



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## MHFA Pilot Training Session at VCU

- August 1, 2018 in BioTech One
- Instructors: Michelle Schmidt and Layne Mitchell
- 8 hour session, with a 30 minute break for lunch
- 29 of 30 registered attendees attended
  - Higher than the average MHFA attendance rate



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## Outline of Course

Course broadly divided into:

- Mental health problems in the United States (how common, impact, spectrum of interventions)
- First aid for mental health problems (i.e. depression, anxiety, substance abuse disorders, and eating disorders)
- First aid for mental health crises (e.g. suicidal thoughts or behaviors, panic attacks, and psychosis)



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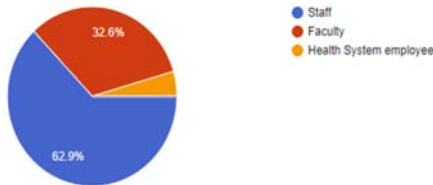
## MHFA Approach

- A** • Assess for risk of suicide or harm
- L** • Listen non-judgmentally
- G** • Give reassurance and information
- E** • Encourage appropriate professional help
- E** • Encourage self-help and other support strategies



## Advertising the Pilot Training Session

- TelegRAM
- Within 3 hours, all 30 seats for the session were filled
- 59 people remain on the waitlist
- 50+ departments are represented on the registration list, indicating a wide range of interest



## Short-term Outcomes

95%

Felt that they could recognize and correct misconceptions about mental health and mental illness

95%

Felt more confident that they could assist a person who may be dealing with a mental health problem or crisis to seek professional help.

## Free Response Feedback

"More comfortable with uncomfortable situations and an increased spirit in humanity."

"It increased my empathy and lessened my fear of dealing with that kind of situation."

"I was excited to take the course and was happy to say the course lived up to my expectations. As someone with a background in mental health, the course was very informative and really useful even for someone with a clinical/diagnostic background."

## Free Response Feedback

"I found it to be quite comprehensive and substantive given the limited time-frame allotted."

"The material covered was comprehensive, but at the same time gave practical steps and strategies for assisting someone that is in the midst of a mental health crisis. In stressful situations like these, it is so helpful to be prepared with a plan."

"This course was fantastic and engaging. The material was useful and practical, and I am very glad that this was offered as an option for VCU employees."

## Long-term Outcomes

95%

Agreed that this program helps to develop a university-wide culture of appreciation

63%

Agreed that this program would help to retain faculty/staff

## Does it matter?

100%

Agreed this program would be a valuable addition to VCU's professional development opportunities

100%

Would recommend this training program to others



## Potential Long-term Outcomes for VCU

- Healthier work environment
- Decreased stigma surrounding mental health issues
- Increased referrals to the EAP (Employee Assistance Program)
- Increased employee retention and productivity

## VCU Quest for Distinction

The implementation of the MHFA training program aligns with the VCU Quest for Distinction:

**Theme I:** Become a leader among national research universities in providing all students with high-quality learning/living experiences focused on inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global environment.

## VCU Quest 2025: Together We Transform

The implementation of the MHFA training program aligns with VCU Quest 2025: Together We Transform:

**Theme IV: Diversity Driving Excellence** - Translate our value philosophy of diversity and inclusion into practices related to excellence and success.

## Sustainability, Financing, & Resources

### Sustainability

- VCU Human Resources (Retention & Recruitment)

### Financing & Resources

- General Assembly funds cover:
  1. Trainer fees
  2. Manuals
  3. Cost to train new trainers

### Bottom line

- Only cost to VCU will be if (optional) snacks or refreshments are provided.

## Recommendations

- For VCU to adopt the MHFA training program as a professional development opportunity for faculty and staff
- Offer 2-3 training sessions each year
  - One per semester, including summer
- House the program in Human Resources

## If not now, when?

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People signed up for 30 slots

100%

Believe this would be valuable for VCU to offer

100%

Would recommend this to others

**Thank You!**

