

WHERE'S MY MIND

Finding support in tough times.

Being the eldest of nine children, Yuriem Rodriguez, junior secondary education major, always felt a sense of responsibility to take care of others. This feeling has often been accompanied by stress and anxiety. When she graduated high school in 2009, she joined the military, even though she wanted to go to college.

"I thought about going to college, but I knew I wasn't mentally there to focus on school," Rodriguez said.

While in the military, Rodriguez said she faced multiple hardships and felt mentally drained. After years of being deployed, her contract ended and she chose not to reenlist to spend more time with her siblings.

Rodriguez worked full-time for a few years while helping take care of her siblings, still struggling with her mental health. In 2018, she moved from Pennsylvania to Florida to pursue her long-awaited college experience and become a secondary education teacher.

"I was like, I'm going back to school. I'm getting my degree. Nothing is stopping me this time," Rodriguez said.

As she began her college career in 2020, something actually did stop her, COVID-19.

"I was like, 'you got to be kidding me,' like, there's always another obstacle," Rodriguez said.

Feeling discouraged, Rodriguez tried to find ways to cope with her feelings through the saying, "hurt, feel, pray, heal"

"You can't get through it if you don't let yourself accept whatever it is that is going on," Rodriguez said.

Through finding comfort in her emotions, letting herself hurt, reaching out to trusted people in her life and setting goals for herself, she pushed through the anxiety, depression, and stress.

"If you have to cry because you're stressed out, cry, like, let it all out," Rodriguez said. "Then you're going to be like, alright, why am I even crying at this point? I'm good, I let it out. I feel better. I feel refreshed."

At UCF, the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers individual assessments, therapy, workshops, crisis interventions and more to any enrolled-health-fee paying student, according to UCF's website.

by Leticia Silva

During the academic year 2021-22, CAPS offered services to 5,769 students from UCF and Valencia's downtown campus, according to their annual report.

Of those who got services from CAPS, 64% displayed symptoms of anxiety and 44% displayed symptoms of depression. Ninety-five percent of UCF students who were included in the annual report said that CAPS has been helpful and effective in their lives. Vanessa Stein, assistant director of CAPS, introduced effective coping strategies and exercises that students can use that do not require them to seek professional help.

Stein said educating yourself on mental health and recognizing the signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression are some of the most beneficial things you can do to better your mental health. Some symptoms to look out for include: low-mood, irritability, loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed, worry, fear, thoughts that feel like they are out of control and fear of judgment.

Stein also discussed an application provided through the UCF app, "Togetherness," that allows students to anonymously communicate with other students about mental health struggles, reminding students they are never alone.

"We try to offer services where everyone is safe," Stein said.

Though Stein recognizes that not everyone needs therapy or professional counseling, she recommends having a support system when going through difficult times.

"Let someone know, even if it's not a counselor," Stein said. "If it's a friend, if it's a trusted family member, if it's a religious figure, whoever that is, because you never want to be alone."

Stein said that self-care is extremely important when it comes to mental health. Recognizing changes in sleeping, eating, physical and social habits and making the appropriate adjustments can allow almost anyone to help themselves through challenging situations. ↕

"NOTHING IS STOPPING ME THIS TIME."

Illustrations by Azeem Dawlat

at UCF

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