



Beyond Academic Support: The Community College Library as a Space for Mental Health and Wellbeing

Alison Wang, Rebecca Brunson, Barrett Jones, & Kristen Spencer

Abstract:

Community college students often face complex academic, financial, and personal pressures that can negatively affect their mental health and overall wellbeing. While counseling centers provide essential clinical support, many institutions are exploring broader campus approaches to promoting student wellness. Academic libraries, as accessible and inclusive campus spaces, are increasingly recognized as important contributors to these efforts. This paper examines the role of community college libraries in supporting student wellbeing while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries.

To cite this article:

Wang, A., Brunson, R., Jones, B., & Spencer, K. (2026). Beyond Academic Support: The Community College Library as a Space for Mental Health and Wellbeing. *International Journal of Librarianship*, 11(1), 21-32. <https://doi.org/10.23974/ijol.2026.vol11.1.607>

To submit your article to this journal:

Go to <https://ojs.calajol.org/index.php/ijol/about/submissions>

Beyond Academic Support: The Community College Library as a Space for Mental Health and Wellbeing

Alison Wang, Rebecca Brunson, Barrett Jones, Kristen Spencer
CT State Community College, Norwalk Campus Library, United States

ABSTRACT

Community college students often face complex academic, financial, and personal pressures that can negatively affect their mental health and overall wellbeing. While counseling centers provide essential clinical support, many institutions are exploring broader campus approaches to promoting student wellness. Academic libraries, as accessible and inclusive campus spaces, are increasingly recognized as important contributors to these efforts. This paper examines the role of community college libraries in supporting student wellbeing while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries.

Keywords: Community College Libraries, Student Wellbeing, Academic Libraries, Student Success

INTRODUCTION

Student mental health has become an increasingly important concern in higher education as students face growing academic, financial, and social pressures. Academic expectations, financial stress, social transitions, and family responsibilities can all significantly impact students' emotional well-being. In response, colleges and universities are placing greater emphasis on expanding mental health services, promoting wellness initiatives, and developing campus environments that support student wellbeing. Addressing these challenges and providing accessible mental health resources helps create conditions in which students can thrive both personally and academically.

Research indicates that mental health challenges often emerge during the age range when many students begin their college education. Half of all lifetime mental health conditions emerge by age 14, and three-fourths surface by age 24 (Kessler et al., 2005). This means that many students arrive at college with previously diagnosed conditions or begin to experience symptoms during their college years. The National Healthy Minds Study, which surveyed students on 373 campuses in 2020–2021, found that over 60 percent of college students met the criteria for one or more mental health problems, representing nearly a 50 percent increase since 2013 (Lipson et al., 2022). Similarly, Wyatt et al. (2017) suggests that the first year of college is a particularly important period for promoting awareness of mental health issues, as well as providing strategies that help students manage stress and maintain academic engagement.

Community college students often face additional challenges that may intensify these mental health concerns. Many community college students balance coursework with employment, family responsibilities, and financial pressures. A large proportion are first-generation college students or individuals returning to education later in life. Students with fewer financial resources and less social capital may be particularly vulnerable to feelings of isolation or lack of belonging. This vulnerability to belongingness may especially affect students from minority ethnic and racial backgrounds, first-generation students, students in the LGBTQIA+ community, and those whose identities intersect across multiple marginalized categories (Buddington, 2025). Providing mental health resources and supportive environments, particularly during students' early college experiences, can help ensure that they develop the resilience and support networks they need to succeed academically.

In addition to providing academic support, many libraries have introduced programs designed to reduce stress and promote a sense of community. Activities such as origami workshops, puzzles, movie nights, and coloring events provide students with opportunities to relax and engage in creative expression. These programs can help balance the pressures of academic demands while fostering social interaction and campus engagement (Bjork et al., 2025). Furthermore, libraries increasingly collaborate with other campus services—including tutoring centers, writing centers, wellness programs, and food pantries—to support students holistically by addressing both academic and personal needs (Bjork et al., 2025). Such collaborations reflect a growing recognition that student success is closely connected to overall wellbeing.

While libraries are not clinical mental health providers, they can contribute meaningfully to campus wellbeing initiatives by creating supportive learning environments and connecting students to appropriate resources. Effective mental health and wellness initiatives in academic libraries require careful consideration of the unique student populations being served to ensure that programs and services are relevant, inclusive, and impactful.

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CONTEXT

Community colleges serve a student population that differs significantly from that of many four-year residential institutions, and these differences shape the ways in which community college libraries can support student wellbeing. In the United States, community colleges offer access to higher education for many students who might be unable to attend college; these students are often older, more likely to attend part-time, and more likely to balance multiple responsibilities outside of school. National data consistently shows that community colleges enroll a large proportion of first-generation college students, adult learners, students from lower-income backgrounds, and students from historically underrepresented groups. “About 70% of community college students work while enrolled, 26% are student parents, 30% are first-generation students, and about one-third receive Pell grants given limited financial resources” (Broton et al, 2022, p. 459). Many students commute to community college campuses rather than living in residence halls, and their time on campus may be limited to attending classes and accessing essential services before returning to work or family responsibilities. These factors can contribute to increased stress and reduced opportunities for students to build social connections or access support resources.

Mental health challenges can significantly affect students' ability to persist in higher education, contributing to a broader pattern in which student attrition is influenced by a range of

academic, financial, and personal factors. At 2-year degree-granting institutions, the retention rate in Fall 2020 for first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students who entered in fall 2019 was 61 percent. The retention rate for public 2-year institutions was 61 percent, which was lower than the retention rates of private nonprofit and private for-profit 2-year institutions, which were 68 percent and 67 percent, respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Over the past decade, community college students in particular have experienced an increase in mental health problems that often stem from external factors. The data show that overall health and wellness are socially determined, reflecting disparities linked to race, gender, early life experiences, income, housing stability, food security, and access to health care (Bladek, 2021).

Economic instability is a major factor shaping the experiences of community college students, many of whom also work while enrolled and who may also struggle with food insecurity. According to the U.S. Department of Education, over two-thirds of community college students have jobs: at public 2-year institutions, with 34% working over 31 hours per week, 64% of these working students had unmet financial needs (Beer & Bray, 2019). The National Postsecondary Student Aid Study revealed that more than one in five college students—about 22%—are also parents (Cruse et al. 2019). Furthermore, a study published by four campus-based organizations found that 48 percent of students reported food insecurity in the 30 days leading up to the study, including 22% with very low levels of food security that would qualify them as hungry. This same study revealed that 25% of community college students overall qualified as having very low food security. Food insecurity was also more prevalent among students of color, and more than half of all first-generation students were food insecure (Dubick et al. 2016). Food insecurity is often related to lower student grade point average through poor mental health (Martinez et al. 2020).

First-generation college students represent a particularly significant portion of the community college population. These students are the first in their families to attend college and may have limited familiarity with the expectations and structures of higher education. As a result, they often face additional challenges in navigating academic systems, locating resources, and understanding institutional norms. Research has shown that first-generation students are more likely to experience uncertainty about academic processes, including research assignments, citation practices, and the use of scholarly sources. These uncertainties can contribute to what is sometimes described as “library anxiety”—a sense of intimidation or discomfort when using library spaces, services, or research tools. For students who already feel uncertain about their place within higher education, unfamiliar environments can heighten stress and discourage help-seeking behavior.

In addition to being first-generation students, many community college learners are also balancing employment and caregiving responsibilities, including caring for children, elderly relatives, or other family members. These responsibilities can create demanding schedules that limit the time available for studying, meeting with instructors, or participating in campus activities. Financial pressures, transportation challenges, and time constraints can further complicate students' abilities to fully engage with the academic environment. In order to counterbalance these forces, there has been an increased emphasis on student wellbeing and support while they are on campus. For students navigating these pressures, having access to supportive campus spaces and services becomes especially important.

Because of these realities, community college libraries must adopt approaches to student support that reflect the lived experiences of their student populations. Unlike libraries at residential

universities, community college libraries often serve as both academic resource centers and flexible study environments for commuter students who may not have reliable or quiet places to work at home. Libraries can help mitigate stress by providing consistent access to technology, research assistance, and comfortable study spaces that accommodate a range of needs. Equally important, library staff can foster an atmosphere that emphasizes approachability and nonjudgmental support. By recognizing the unique pressures faced by community college students and intentionally designing services and spaces that reduce barriers, libraries can contribute meaningfully to a campus culture that supports both academic success and student wellbeing. Within this context, the campus library often becomes one of the few consistently available spaces where students can study, seek assistance, and briefly step away from external pressures; community college libraries, therefore, are uniquely situated to engage in efforts to support the mental health of students.

CASE STUDY: THE CT STATE NORWALK CAMPUS LIBRARY

Community college libraries are uniquely positioned to support the wellbeing of their student population because they function as both academic and social spaces within the campus at large. The Everett I. L. Baker Library on the CT State Norwalk Campus provides a useful case study of how an academic library can intentionally cultivate an environment that reduces academic stress and supports student wellbeing while keeping within appropriate professional boundaries. Through thoughtful space design, academic support services, strategic partnerships, and an inclusive service culture, the library serves as a stabilizing and supportive presence for students navigating the complex demands of community college life.

CT State Norwalk is a two-year community college located in southwestern Connecticut. Established in 1961 as Norwalk Community College, the college is now one of twelve CT State Community Colleges. As of Winter 2025, the college has 2,481 FTE students. Of those students, 60% are female; 66% are age 24 or younger; 66% are first-generation college students; 46% are Hispanic, 25% White, 16% Black, and 5% Asian; and 39% are eligible for free tuition (CT State Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Planning 2025). 30% of students at CT State Norwalk come from the city of Norwalk, Connecticut, and 32% from the nearby city of Stamford, Connecticut (CT State Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Planning 2025). 30% of Norwalk's population is foreign-born, with 38.6% percent of households speaking languages other than English at home. 31% of Stamford's population is foreign-born with 40.6% of households speaking languages other than English at home (United States Census Bureau Quick Facts 2020-24).

The specific need for mental health and wellness support has been increasing on the CT State Norwalk campus. From 2024-2025, the college's mental health services saw a 30% increase in sessions and a 40% increase in students served by our one full-time Wellness Counselor. Factors affecting the mental health of CT State Norwalk students include stress over immigration issues, residual issues from the COVID pandemic, and adjusting during the first year of college. Students seek help with anxiety, depression, grief, trauma, neurodivergent issues, and time management (A. Hurlburt, personal communication, Feb 20, 2026).

One of the most visible ways the CT State Norwalk Campus Library supports student wellbeing is through maintaining a welcoming and flexible physical environment. Unlike many

other campus spaces that are structured around formal instruction or administrative tasks, the library offers students a place where they can choose to work, study, or regroup in ways that are unique to them. For example, our Reading Commons space provides an open-seating plan with comfortable furniture. Intentionally designed to be calm rather than silent, this area allows students to focus on work or relax independently without the pressure of absolute silence. In addition to this open study area, the library offers enclosed study rooms that students can reserve for group work or quiet individual study. These rooms are particularly valuable for students who may not have access to quiet environments at home, a common challenge for community college students balancing work, family responsibilities, and shared living spaces. Flexible furniture and layout in these and other connecting library spaces further support an environment that students can adapt to their needs; tables and seating can be easily moved and reconfigured, whether clustering tables together for collaborative projects or creating more private study areas for individual work. This flexibility reinforces the idea that the library belongs to students and can be shaped to support a wide range of individual learning styles and study preferences. By providing adaptable physical spaces, the library reduces barriers to academic engagement and allows our students to create environments that feel comfortable and productive.

The CT State Norwalk Library also promotes a culture of availability to support our students through our extended operating hours and approachable service culture. The library is open when students need us, including weekday evenings and Saturdays—working with the complex schedules of our students who often balance coursework with employment, caregiving responsibilities, and long commutes. By maintaining extended hours, we hope to ensure that students have reliable access to study space, technology, and academic support regardless of when their schedules allow them to be on campus. For students who may feel overwhelmed or isolated while managing competing demands, the library’s consistent availability provides both practical support and a sense of stability. Our open hours are covered by a current staff of 4 full-time professional librarians, including the campus library director, 2 part-time librarians, a library associate, and anywhere from 3-5 student workers. In the academic year spanning 2024-25, we answered direct questions from 2,840 patrons; taught 125 classes to 2,186 students; and conducted 48 research appointments. During this time, students visited the library 7,502 times; consulted reserve textbooks 3,243 times; and used the library’s study rooms 1,698 times.

All library staff members embody a non-judgmental service philosophy that encourages students to ask questions and seek guidance. This “Ask Us” culture helps reduce anxiety related to research, assignments, and navigating campus resources—particularly for first-generation students who may be unfamiliar with academic expectations—and reinforces the library as a supportive space where students can access both information and assistance with confidence. When students feel comfortable asking for help, they are more likely to engage with academic support services and persist through challenging coursework.

In addition to creating supportive physical spaces, the CT State Norwalk Library actively works to reduce academic stress through our information literacy instruction and targeted workshops. One key initiative is the library’s collaboration with instructors who teach the College and Career Success course (CCS 1001) required for all CT State students. Partnering with this program allows us to provide whole-program library instruction to all sections of CCS 1001. These sessions introduce students early in their college experience to essential research skills while also addressing library anxiety. Many students, particularly first-generation students or those new to college-level research, feel intimidated by library systems, unfamiliar terminology, or the

expectation that they should already know how to conduct academic research. And while our stated focus during these scheduled class visits is on demonstrating how to locate and evaluate sources and normalizing questions about how to do academic research, they also serve as an opportunity to invite our students to view the library as a supportive academic environment by highlighting our available study spaces, encouraging students to return to the library to work or relax, and introducing the library staff as supportive partners in their academic journey. In this way, instruction sessions function not only as skill-building opportunities, but also as an integral strategy toward building trust and encouraging curiosity, increasing student comfort with the library, and reinforcing the message that the CT State Norwalk Library is an accessible place for both student and academic support.

Beyond faculty collaboration, strategic partnerships across campus further strengthen the CT State Norwalk Library's role in supporting student wellbeing by connecting students with a broader network of support services. For example, collaboration with the campus wellness counselor has resulted in our establishing the groundwork for providing future space within the library for quiet meditation or reflection activities. While the library does not provide counseling services, it can offer a visible and accessible location where students can participate in mindfulness or relaxation activities led by trained wellness professionals. In addition, the library regularly partners with other campus departments by providing space and logistical support for campus initiatives such as student orientation, registration assistance workshops, and open house programs. These collaborations introduce students to the library early in their college experience and reinforce its role as a welcoming and supportive campus hub. By hosting and participating in these cross-departmental initiatives, the library helps strengthen connections between academic services, student support programs, and the broader campus community while ensuring that students encounter the library as an integrated part of the college's overall support network. This collaborative approach helps reduce the intimidation that some students associate with academic institutions.

Taken together, these strategies illustrate how the CT State Norwalk Campus Library functions as more than a traditional academic support service. Through intentional design, inclusive service practices, and cross-campus collaboration, the library helps create conditions that reduce stress and support student wellbeing. While librarians are not mental health professionals, the environment they cultivate can play a meaningful role in helping students feel supported, connected, and capable of succeeding in their academic work. In this way, the CT State Norwalk Campus Library demonstrates daily how community college libraries can contribute to a broader culture of student wellbeing while remaining grounded in their core educational mission.

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As academic libraries increasingly engage in initiatives that support student mental health and wellbeing, it is essential to clarify the scope and limits of the librarian's professional role. While libraries can contribute meaningfully to reducing academic stress and fostering a sense of belonging, they are not clinical or therapeutic spaces. Librarians are information professionals, not mental health practitioners. Their role in supporting wellbeing is indirect—through the provision of inclusive environments, accessible resources, academic skill development, and referral to appropriate campus services.

One potential risk in expanding library-based wellbeing initiatives is “mission creep,” where responsibilities gradually extend beyond professional expertise or institutional mandate. Well-intentioned efforts to support students may emerge from genuine care and concern yet expecting librarians to provide counseling or emotional intervention can blur role boundaries and create unrealistic expectations. Such expansion may also increase emotional labor demands on staff who are not trained in trauma response or crisis management. Sustainable and ethical practice, therefore, requires clarity of purpose and a defined scope of service, grounded in professional standards.

A referral-based support model provides a balanced and responsible framework. Rather than attempting to replace campus counseling services, libraries can function as connectors and amplifiers of institutional resources. For example, at CT State Norwalk, students have access to dedicated wellness and mental health support platforms, such as Simplicity’s mental health and wellness accommodations portal (*Mental Health & Wellness Accommodation Portal*), where trained professionals provide confidential guidance and support. By prominently displaying information about these services, collaborating with the campus wellness counselor to host informational sessions, and incorporating referral materials into research guides and library outreach, the CT State Norwalk Library becomes a bridge to professional support rather than a substitute.

Strategic partnerships with wellness professionals and other campus support service centers also offer a way to enhance student support while maintaining professional boundaries. By collaborating with counseling centers, disability services, or wellness coordinators, librarians can help ensure that students are aware of and connected to the appropriate services without overstepping their role. Such collaboration may include co-sponsored events, joint resource guides, or integrated orientation sessions in which librarians and wellness counselors jointly present information about academic and emotional support resources.

Ethical considerations also extend to sensitive communication and student privacy. Students experiencing stress or emotional difficulty may view the library as a safe and non-judgmental space. Staff interactions must therefore be handled with sensitivity and discretion. Libraries should avoid collecting unnecessary personal data related to mental health disclosures and should refrain from informal documentation of sensitive conversations. Embracing a trauma-informed service mindset—grounded in respect, empathy, and non-intrusive support—can help ensure that students feel welcomed without being pressured to disclose personal information.

Ultimately, community college libraries can play a meaningful role in supporting student wellbeing when their efforts are grounded in professional boundaries, ethical awareness, and collaborative partnership. By maintaining clear role definitions and referral pathways, libraries contribute to a culture of care while preserving the integrity of their academic mission.

BUILDING A FRAMEWORK FOR LIBRARY-SUPPORTED WELLBEING

While professional boundaries must remain clear, community college libraries can still play a meaningful role in supporting student wellbeing through the intentional design of services, spaces, and partnerships. Building on the ethical considerations discussed above, this paper proposes a

Four-Pillar Model for Library-Supported Wellbeing that aligns with the academic mission of libraries while contributing to a supportive campus environment.

The model emphasizes four interconnected areas of practice: Academic Support, Space, Partnerships, and Belonging. Academic support remains a foundational pillar of library services and is closely intertwined with the other areas of this model. While providing research guidance and assignment support is a core expectation of librarianship, the following sections focus more closely on the other three pillars—space, partnerships, and belonging. Together, these four pillars create a holistic environment that supports students' academic success while also fostering wellbeing and a sense of community.

Pillar I: Academic Support—Reducing Research Anxiety and Strengthening Student Confidence

Academic support is the foundational role of the academic library and remains central to student wellbeing. For many community college students, research assignments and unfamiliar academic expectations create significant stress. Navigating scholarly databases, citation practices, and academic terminology may feel intimidating. When students feel uncertain about how to begin their research or where to seek help, academic challenges can quickly escalate into broader feelings of frustration and self-doubt.

Libraries can help alleviate this form of academic stress by providing accessible research support, clear instructional guidance, and welcoming opportunities for students to ask questions. At the CT State Norwalk Campus Library, librarians regularly provide course-integrated information literacy instruction, individual research consultations, and online research guides designed to simplify the research process. These services help students develop confidence in locating and evaluating information while reinforcing the message that seeking assistance is a normal and encouraged part of academic learning.

By demystifying the research process and offering supportive guidance, libraries reduce barriers to academic engagement. In doing so, they not only strengthen students' research skills but also help create a learning environment in which students feel capable, supported, and empowered to succeed.

Pillar II: Space—Creating a Calm and Inclusive Environment

The physical environment of the library forms the foundation of student wellbeing support. As acknowledged earlier, for many students, the library provides a reliable and structured environment on campus where they can concentrate on their studies. Quiet study areas, group study rooms, comfortable seating, and access to technology allow students to choose learning environments that best suit their needs. The usage data from the CT State Norwalk Campus Library illustrates the importance of these spaces. The library's three group study rooms, for example, are consistently in high demand, with 1,378 bookings recorded in FY2024 and 1,733 bookings in FY2025, demonstrating the strong need for collaborative and supportive study environments.

A thoughtfully designed library environment can reduce stress by offering stability and predictability in students' daily routines. Inclusive designs such as accessible facilities, clear signage, and welcoming service points help ensure that all students feel comfortable using the library space. In this way, the library functions not only as an academic resource center but also as a calm and supportive environment that encourages focused learning.

Pillar III: Belonging—Fostering Community and Inclusion

A sense of belonging is a critical factor in student persistence and wellbeing, particularly for community college students who may be first-generation college attendees or returning adult learners. Libraries can contribute to this sense of belonging by utilizing their adaptable and inclusive spaces to host programs that encourage student engagement with the larger campus community.

At the CT State Norwalk Campus Library, events such as Earth Day programming and campus Common Read activities are hosted in the library, helping students experience the library as a welcoming and familiar campus space that also supports larger initiatives. These activities allow students to interact with faculty, staff, and peers in an informal and supportive environment, strengthening their connection to the college community.

During final exams week, the CT State Norwalk Campus Library also organizes “Popcorn and Puzzles,” a stress-relief activity that provides students a brief and enjoyable break during one of the most demanding times of the semester. After several semesters, many students have come to expect our popcorn event as an essential part of their final exams week routine, viewing it as a moment of comfort during an otherwise stressful academic period. Informal student feedback suggests that these initiatives help students feel welcomed and supported, reinforcing the idea that the library is the place where they belong.

Pillar IV: Partnerships—Coordinated Campus Support

Student wellbeing is most effectively supported through coordinated efforts across multiple campus units. Libraries can play an important role as connectors within this network of support. Partnerships with counseling services, advising offices, tutoring centers, and student success programs help ensure that students are aware of the resources available to them. For example, on the Norwalk campus, the library participates in collaborative initiatives such as “Super Saturday” registration events, where students receive assistance with course enrollment, advising, and campus services in a welcoming environment. By hosting or supporting such initiatives, the library helps students navigate institutional processes and reduces anxiety associated with academic planning and registration.

This Four-Pillar Model can easily be adapted by community colleges with varying institutional contexts and resource levels. While some libraries may already have extensive programming or dedicated spaces, others may begin with smaller initiatives, such as improving study environments, expanding research support services, or strengthening collaborations with campus partners.

Importantly, the framework does not require large financial investments. Instead, it encourages libraries to intentionally align existing services with broader institutional goals related to student success and wellbeing. By supplementing academic guidance with supportive spaces, collaborative partnerships, and inclusive programming, community college libraries can adapt this model to reflect their local campus needs while maintaining clear professional boundaries.

CONCLUSION

Community college students often navigate complex academic, financial, and personal challenges that can significantly affect their mental health and overall wellbeing. As institutions work to address these challenges through campus-wide support systems, community college libraries can play an important complementary role. Although libraries are not clinical mental health providers, they can support student wellbeing by reducing academic stress, fostering a sense of belonging, and connecting students with appropriate campus resources.

This paper proposed a Four-Pillar Model for Library-Supported Wellbeing—Academic Support, Space, Partnerships, and Belonging—as a framework for understanding how libraries can contribute to student wellbeing while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. Together, these pillars demonstrate how libraries can promote both academic success and emotional resilience through accessible research support, thoughtfully designed spaces, collaborative partnerships, and inclusive programming. By aligning existing services with broader institutional goals related to student success and wellbeing, community college libraries can create supportive environments that respond to the realities of students’ lives while remaining grounded in their core educational mission.

References

- ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee (2020). 2020 top trends in academic libraries: A review of the trends and issues affecting academic libraries in higher education. *College & Research Libraries News*, 81(6), 270. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.81.6.270>
- Beer, A. & Bray, J. B. (2019). The college-work balancing act. Washington, D.C. Association of Community College Trustees. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED605123>
- Bjork, J., Dworak, E., & Kurtz-Shaw, G. (2025). Promoting libraries through inclusive and impactful environments. *RUSQ: A Journal of Reference & User Experience*, 60(4), 170–177. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=f77c9f43-8f68-322d-b009-707e781b86bc>
- Bladek, Marta. (2021). Student well-being matters: Academic library support for the whole student. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 47(3), 102349. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2021.102349>
- Broton, K. M., Mohebal, M., & Lingo, M. D. (2022). Basic needs insecurity and mental health: Community college students’ dual challenges and use of social support. *Community College Review*, 50(4), 456–482. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00915521221111460>
- Buddington, L. (2025). Growth mindset, resilience, college student retention and engagement in preventative mental health activities: A focus on vulnerable groups. *Journal of American College Health*: 73(10), 3985-3993. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2025.2464769>
- Cruse, L. R., Holtzman, T., Gault, B., Croom, D., & Polk, P. (2019). *Parents in college: By the numbers*. Institute for Women’s Policy Research. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED612580>
- CT State. (2026). *Mental Health & Wellness Accommodation Portal*. <https://ctstate-mentalhealth-wellness-accommodate.symplicity.com/>

- CT State (2025). Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Planning Spring 2025 Enhanced Credit Census Report .
- Dubick, J., Mathews, B., & Cady. (2016, October). *Hunger on campus: The challenge of food insecurity for college students*. <https://studentsagainsthunger.org/hunger-on-campus/>
- Kessler, R. C., Berglund, P., Demler, O., Jin, R., Merikangas, K. R., & Walters, E. E. (2005). Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62(6), 593–602. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.62.6.593>
- Lipson, S. K., Zhou, S., Abelson, S., Heinze, J., Jirsa, M., Morigney, J., Patterson, A., Singh, M., & Eisenberg, D. (2022). Trends in college student mental health and help-seeking by race/ethnicity: Findings from the national healthy minds study, 2013–2021. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 306, 138-147. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2022.03.038>
- Martinez, S. M., Frongillo, E. A., Leung, C., & Ritchie, L. (2020). No food for thought: Food insecurity is related to poor mental health and lower academic performance among students in California's public university system. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 25(12), 1930–1939. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105318783028>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). Undergraduate retention and graduation rates. *Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved March 5, 2026. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/ctr>
- United States Census Bureau Quick Facts 2020-24.
- Wyatt, T. J., Oswalt, S. B., & Ochoa, Y. (2017). Mental health and academic performance of first-year college students. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(3), 178–187. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=760b67f5-7919-3c67-9f60-6cce7bf383fc>

About the authors

Alison Wang is Library Director at CT State Community College, Norwalk Campus. With extensive experience in academic libraries, she is passionate about advancing student success through information literacy, collaboration, and innovative library services.

Becky Brunson is a Reference and Instruction Librarian at CT State Community College, Norwalk Campus. Her work focuses on information literacy, student success, and inclusive, student-centered library services. She contributes to system-wide initiatives in virtual reference, assessment, and shared information literacy frameworks.

Barrett Jones is the Digital and Instruction Librarian at CT State Community College, Norwalk Campus. He supports digital library services, information literacy instruction, and student research, and collaborates on system-wide technology initiatives. He holds a BA from the University of Wisconsin–Madison and an MLIS from UCLA.

Kristen Spencer is the Access/Instruction Librarian at CT State Community College- Norwalk. Her work includes information literacy instruction, with a focus on media literacy and resource evaluation, as well as collaborating with faculty and staff to create and develop online resources to support campus programming for student success.