

A Partnership for Mental Health & Well-Being

Susan Terry, Director, UW Career Center

There is a current issue that holds concern for all educators. Across the country, college career counseling centers report increased frequency and severity of students' mental health issues. As reported recently by the *U.S. News and World Report*, "About ten percent of students have seriously considered committing suicide; 45 percent of students say they've been so depressed it was difficult to function; and more than 30 percent of freshmen report feeling overwhelmed a great deal of the time."

Consider the fact that many students today go to college with the aid of medication for serious mental illnesses that ten years ago would have prevented them from attending school. On many campuses, wellness and mental health concerns have taken center stage. It is a primary topic of concern and discussion in student affairs, and has become a focus of funding priority. As a career center director, I too am concerned with these issues and am fortunate to work with a talented and collaborative counseling center director. We are looking to build additional programming and joint staff efforts to assist students in building their confidence around the ability to succeed and perform well in the classroom, in their experiences external to the classroom, and in their preparation for a career path.

We know that a strong sense of efficacy enhances personal well-being. People with self-confidence in their approach to difficult tasks see those tasks as challenges to be savored rather than obstacles to be avoided. Career centers can contribute to this mental health challenge by helping students to better understand their strengths, while assisting them in understanding how those strengths will work together in creating a productive, healthy and joyful life.

The University of Washington's Career Center uses the Dependable Strengths Articulation Process (DSAP) to support students and alumni in enhancement of their self-esteem, their motivation to achieve and their internal locus of control.

Career counselors in the Center have been facilitating the DSAP workshop for the past ten years. The DSAP process involves guided group work. This is one exercise in a series, which results in a self-discovery of strengths. The process involves groups of four individuals, who discuss with each other their positive experiences in life, and provide feedback to each other. The group process provides a greater sense of shared reality and validation for the participants. These are crucial elements for success in a job search and moreover increasing one's sense of worth and place in the world.

DSAP is one method that can support our efforts to be influential partners in the health and wellness campaign advocating for services and partnership alliances that will help to eradicate this fearsome affliction in our youth of low self-esteem and poor self-confidence. This is a challenge we can embrace, and is a partnership we can build upon in this meaningful work.

Susan Terry is the Director of the UW Career Center, University of Washington, Seattle. She is a Dependable Strengths Master Trainer and a member of the Board of Directors for the Center for Dependable Strengths.