

## mtvU AP 2009 Economy, College Stress and Mental Health Poll



### Methodology and Sample Selection

The mtvU / Associated Press poll was conducted April 22 – May 4, 2009 and included interviews with 2,240 undergraduate students at 40 randomly chosen four year-schools across the Country. The survey was conducted for the Associated Press and mtvU by Edison Media Research of Somerville, NJ, under the direction and supervision of AP's polling unit. The poll has a margin of error of +/- 3.0 percent.

### KEY FINDINGS:

*For the second year in a row, mtvU and the Jed Foundation have partnered with the AP to explore the emotional health of today's college students. We've seen consistent results from year to year, and the stability of the data illustrates that stress remains a part of the college experience. Our results show that stress among students is a significant issue that deserves attention, particularly for students who may be at risk of developing more serious problems.*

*This year, the Poll also explored how students are being impacted by increasing financial pressures.*

### **Stress and the college experience:**

With 85% of students reporting they experience stress on a daily basis (up from 80% last year), it is clear that being stressed is a fact of life on college campuses today.

***Even in light of larger national issues/crisis, school-related concerns remain the key drivers of student stress.***

<i>A lot/some impact</i>	<b>March 2008</b>	<i>A lot/some impact</i>	<b>May 2009</b>
School Work	74%	School Work	77%
Grades in School	71%	Grades in School	74%
Financial woes	62%	Financial woes	67%
Extracurricular activities	50%	Family issues	54%
Family issues	50%	Relationship/dating	53%
Relationship/dating	50%	Extracurricular activities	51%
Friends	39%	Friends	39%
Physical health	36%	Job	36%
Job	33%	Physical health	35%

This year, 52% of students report that the economy has been a source of stress (16% a lot/36% some impact)

***The impact of stress can be seen across all areas of students' lives, affecting them both academically and socially.***

***6 in 10 students report having felt so stressed they couldn't get their work done on one or more occasions (41% once or twice/19% several times)***

***53% of students report having felt so stressed they didn't want to hang out with friends on one or more occasions (35% once or twice/18% several times)***

**Low energy levels, sleep troubles and appetite issues are among the most commonly experienced symptoms that can indicate emotional health problems.**

Experienced Over the last two weeks	May 2009
	Several days/More than half the days/Nearly every day
Feeling Tired or having little energy	69%
Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or sleeping too much	55%
Poor appetite or overeating	45%
Feeling down, depressed or hopeless	42%
Trouble concentrating on things such as reading the newspaper, watching TV	39%
Little interest or pleasure in doing things	38%
Feeling bad about yourself, or that you are a failure/let family down	37%
Moving or speaking so slowly that other people noticed or the opposite	21%
Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or hurting yourself in some way	11%

**One out of every 10 students is reporting signs of moderate to severe depression. An alarming number of students have reached crisis mode**

- 17% of students overall report that their friends have talked about wanting to end their lives
- 10% say a friend has made a suicide attempt
- 7% of students have seriously thought about ending their own lives in the past year

**Where to turn:**

Students are confident in the resources that are available to them when they experience stress or suicidal thoughts; roughly 4 in 5 (84%) say they are sure of where they would go for help if they were in emotional distress. However, they are more likely to reach out to their friends and family before turning to professional sources for help.

- 77% of students say they would turn to friends for help
- 67% of students say they would turn to parents for help

While about half of students report being familiar with the counseling resources available on their campus (48% "somewhat/very familiar"), fewer students would seek them out.

- 20% of students say they would turn to school counseling for help
- 6% of students say they would turn to a Resident Advisor
- 3% of students say they would turn to a crisis hotline

**Resource-disconnect for those that need it the most:**

Among students reporting signs of moderate to severe depression, 47 percent of state that they are not familiar with the counseling resources available on their campuses, and only 32 percent received any support or treatment from a counselor or mental health professional since beginning college.

**IMPACT OF THE ECONOMY**

**While school remains a top stressor for students, it is undeniable that they are feeling the effects of the downturn in the economy**

- Nearly 1 in 3 (32%) college students say financial pressures are a big source of daily stress for them, up from 27% last year
- 17% had seriously considered dropping out of school in the past three months, and financial pressures are the main reason cited as the cause (54%)
- 7% had trouble getting a student loan funded because their bank was having trouble
- 57% are at least somewhat worried they won't be able to find a job after graduation (63% among Seniors)

**For those 1 in 5 students (18%) students who report having a parent who lost their job since the beginning of the school year, the impact of the poor economy is intensified.**

Compared to students whose parents have not experienced job loss, these students are more likely to be dealing with negative thoughts related to school completion and job prospects and to be preoccupied with worry.

- More likely to have considered dropping out of school: 27% vs. 14%
- More likely to be very worried about finding a job for the summer: 23% vs. 11%
- More likely to say they worry about their parents financial situation A LOT: 55% vs. 28%
- Less likely to find college to be definitely worth the time and money: 43% vs. 54%

These students are also more vulnerable to having negative thoughts related to their lives in general. There also seems to be a particular opportunity to reach out to this group to make sure they know where to turn when they need support.

- More likely to have considered talking to a counselor: 36% vs. 27%
- Less sure of the resources available to them; 53% vs. 63%
- More likely to have thought about ending their own life: 13% vs. 5%

### **STUDENTS FACE AN UNCERTAIN JOB MARKET**

- 57 percent of the students polled are worried they won't be able to find a job after graduation, with this number rising to 63 percent among students in their Senior year of college.
- 10 percent of those polled do not plan to return to school next year because they will be taking time off to work.

**Yet, the study shows that many students are maintaining a positive outlook and taking control of their futures by adjusting their plans in response to the difficult job market:**

- 74% of student's today say that they are somewhat/very happy with how things are generally going in their lives compared to 64% in the March 2008 study.
- 82% think their college education so far has been worth the time and money they have spent.
- Nearly one in five say they made the decision to go to graduate school or professional school because they think they might not be able to get a job with just an undergraduate degree.
- Roughly one in 10 changed their major this year because they were worried about job prospects.

**Additionally, during the summer, students report planning to fit more into their schedule this year compared to last year**

- The number of students planning to work in a temporary summer job remains flat vs. last year (52%)
- 27% of students report working at a permanent job this summer compared to 20% last summer
- 13% of students report planning to work a paid internship compared to 8% last summer
- 36% of students plan to take classes this summer compared to 25% last summer