Mental Health App Project

Community-Engaged Learning to Support Allegheny Student Wellbeing

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With contributions from Alexis Pleskovitch '23 and Emily Spitz '23

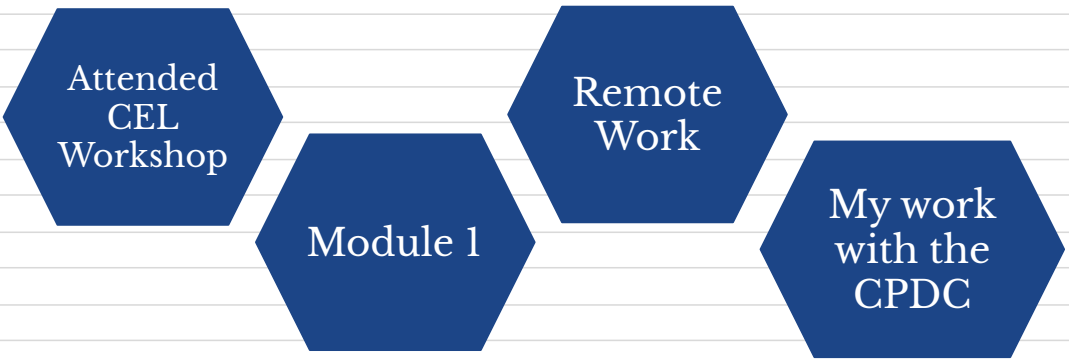
Agenda

- Conceptualization
- Implementation
- Outcomes

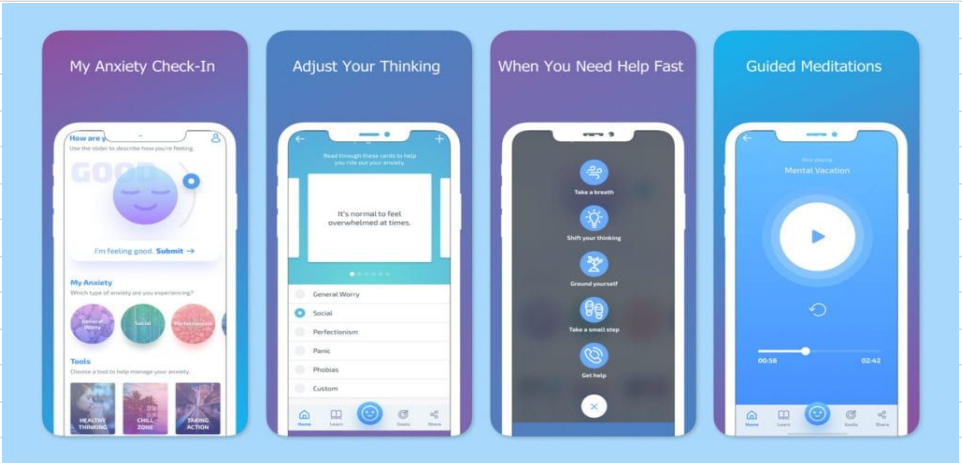
Agenda

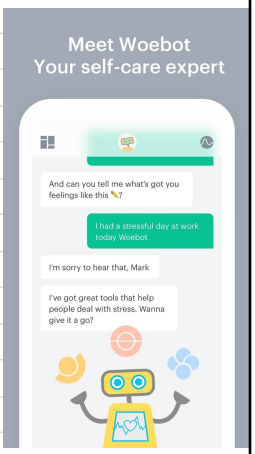
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Conceptualization



What are mental health apps?





Need guidance on app choice…

- There are 10,000+ possible apps available
- Recent research (Melcher & Torous, 2020) suggests college counseling centers are promoting apps that:
  - Have no privacy policy (39%)
  - Have no evidence of their effectiveness published in peer-reviewed journals (84%)

Agenda

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Implementation: Course Description

Class: Digital Mental Health

- Explore current research and theory on tech-based prevention and intervention programs for psychological disorders
- Examine the evidence-base of specific digital mental health programs
- Critically analyze relevant literature comparing in-person to digital mental health services
- Debate ethical issues for current tech-based programs, including privacy and accessibility
- **Experiential and project-based learning is emphasized through student testing of mental health apps and the production of recommendations for mental health apps for Allegheny students**

Implementation: Mental Health Apps Project

- 30% of final course grade
- + integrated into other components of the course

- Task: Collaborate on a project with the Counseling Center (CPDC) to evaluate and recommend mental health apps for Allegheny students!

- This is second iteration

Class Process

- Chose 8 apps for students to evaluate
- All apps were free*
- All have at least one peer-reviewed, published research study or are clearly based in evidence-based principles
- All apps geared towards problems impacting college students
    - anxiety, depression, general stress/well-being

App Choices This Year

- 4 apps that were evaluated last year:
  - Mindfulness
  - AI Chat Bot
  - CBT skills
  - *One recommended app from last year now has a paywall, so we dropped it from our evaluation!*

- 4 new apps:
  - Tracking mood, symptoms, health behaviors
  - COVID-specific support app

Class Process

- CPDC Director (Dani Pecar) spoke to class about CPDC and student mental health on campus

- Students downloaded all apps and ranked preference to investigate
  - 2 apps receiving least interest were dropped before student investigations began → IntelliCare (again!) & Happify

- All students assigned an app to test/use for one week

Class Process

- Presentation to class (groups of 3) on their assigned app
  - Used the American Psychiatric Association (APA) guide for evaluating mental health apps
  - Investigated the following aspects of the apps and reported back to the class:
    - Intended purpose, target symptoms, target population
    - Research Evidence
    - Privacy policy
    - Developers (psychologists vs. business sector)
    - Usability
    - Individual experiences
    - Group recommendation!

Class Process

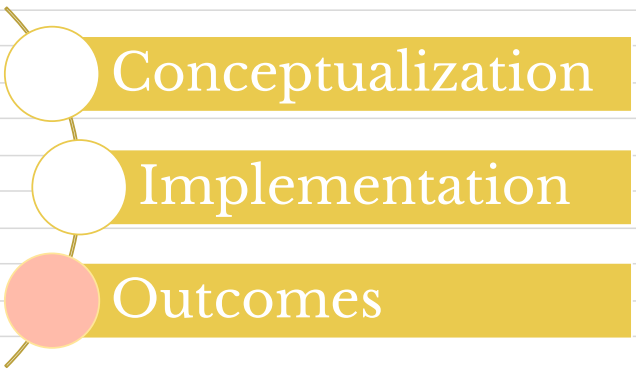
- Each group had a week to continue evaluating apps to decide which apps would be preferred among Allegheny students
- Voting! Students completed anonymous survey about which apps should be recommended to CPDC
- After voting, students discussed results of the survey in small groups to make a final decision for recommendations
- Final decision: 4 apps to recommend to CPDC and Allegheny students
  - 2 retained from last year's recommendations
  - 2 new!

Class Process

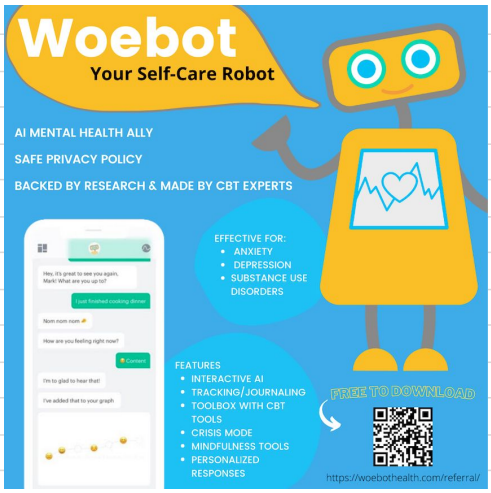
Following final decision, students spent last week of class creating materials for the CPDC about recommended apps:

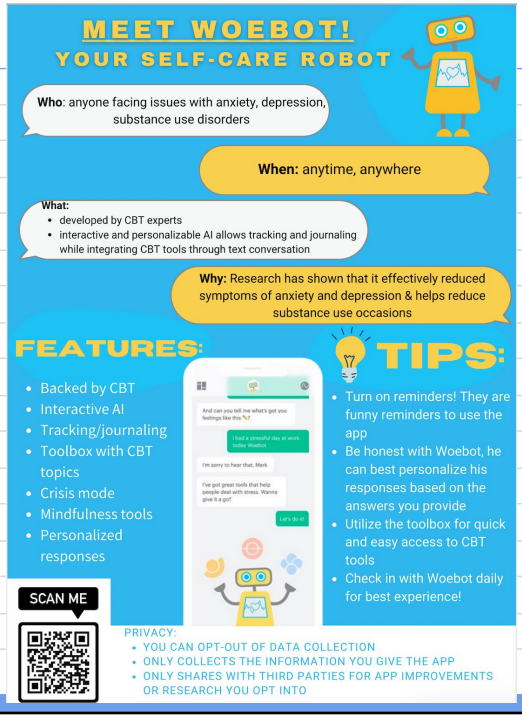
- Info sheet for each app
  - *Uses: hang up on campus, in residence halls, and to be posted on CPDC website*
- Instagram ad for each app
  - *Advertised on CPDC Instagram account*
- Guide for how to choose an effective mental health app
  - *To be posted on CPDC website*
- Suggestions for where & what to add to the CPDC website (*new this year)

Agenda



WoeBot





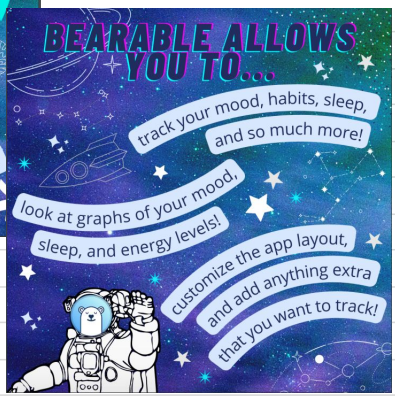
MindShift





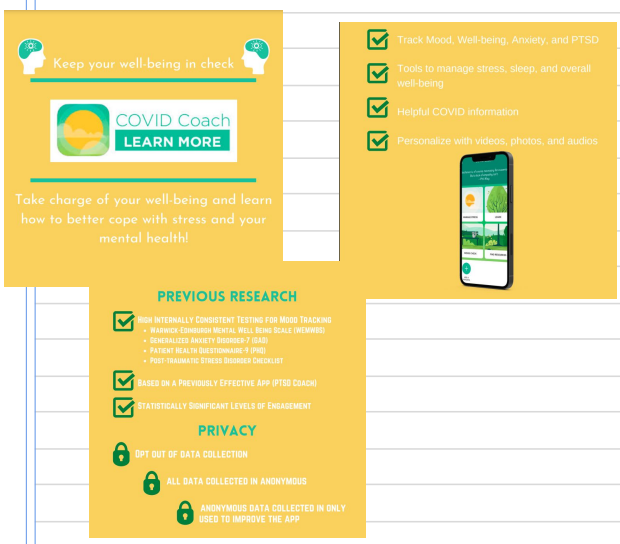
Bearable







COVID Coach

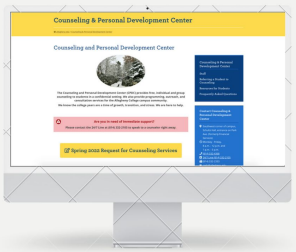




Guide for Choosing Other Apps

Website Design Pitch

Ela and Maddi





Student Reflections

- How did collaborating on this project impact your learning in the class?
- Which components of the project did you like best, or supported your learning, engagement, or enjoyment the most, and why?

Faculty Scholarly Output

- Poster presentation at my international research conference in my field (*Association for Cognitive and Behavioral Therapies*):
  - "Using the Classroom to Promote Evidence-Based Digital Mental Health Tools on College Campuses"

- In press publication in *Teaching of Psychology* ("Scholarly Teacher Corner") peer-reviewed journal:
  - "Using Indirect Service-Learning to Promote Evidence-Based Digital Mental Health Tools on College Campuses"

  - Had an Allegheny student co-author (Sarah Lucas '21)!
    - ****Could be a potential role for CBLA!

Using the Classroom to Promote Evidence-Based Digital Mental Health Tools on College Campuses

PRESENTER:
Sarah Stanger, PhD
Assistant Professor of Psychology
Allegheny College

BACKGROUND

- Increasing college student mental health needs; not enough services on college campuses
- Mental health apps hold potential to increase access; most counseling centers do not promote evidence-based apps

GOAL: use indirect service learning project in clinical psych course to recommend evidence-based apps to college counseling center

METHODS

- Course: Digital Mental Health
  - *Clinical psychology special topics undergrad class at SLAC*
  - *Online, synchronous, 3-weeks, 4-credits*
- 17 students enrolled; 15 participated in study
  - 87.5% female; 75% White
  - *M* age = 20.9; 75% seniors
  - 44% first generation college students

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Allegheny Mental Health Apps Project

Phase 1: Apps to Review
- Free
- Available in Apple and Google app stores
- Target anxiety, depression, or general well-being
- At least one peer-reviewed study supporting efficacy

Apps included: iCBT, IntelliCare, MindShift, MoodMission, MoodPrism, SmilingMind, SuperBetter, and WoeBot

Phase 2: Consult with Direct of Counseling Center

Phase 3: Students Choose App to Evaluate

Phase 4: App Evaluations
- Students used app daily and research app
- Group presentation on app (aligned with APA App Evaluation Model):
  - Developers of the app
  - Most recent app update
  - Transparency and accessibility of privacy policy
  - Intended purpose of app and main features
  - Research evidence supporting app
  - Usability of app
  - Group's final recommendation on whether app is suitable for counseling center to recommend to student based on above considerations

Phase 5: Student Testing of Other Apps & Voting on Recommendations

Phase 6: Final App Recommendations & Creation of Dissemination Materials
- Apps chosen by consensus: **SmilingMind, WoeBot, MoodMission, MindShift**
- Created info sheets (see right panel) and social media ads

Phase 7: Final Student Presentation of Recommendations to Counseling Center

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS: Students reported **increased self-efficacy** following the course (Pre *M* = 3.91, Post *M* = 4.59, $t(14) = 5.14$, $p < .001$)

QUALITATIVE RESULTS: Three themes were identified in student reflections.
- Project helped them **understand the challenges of the professional world.**
- The project provided **community impact and purpose.**
- The project **increased their motivation to comprehend and apply course content.**









Faculty Reflections

- COVID, motivation, enjoyment from teaching
- Peer collaboration, student engagement, student pride

Future ideas

- Do this with/for the Meadville Area High School (partner with Health program)
- Integrate into Adult Psychopathology (formerly Abnormal Behavior), lower level psychology class
    - Grant funding! Bonner Foundation grant this spring (but also other opportunities!)

- Community-Engaged Learning…. where the community is Allegheny?
    - ~~"Real-world applications"~~
    - Partnering with other campus offices?

Questions, thoughts, ideas?