

Department offers classes on depression

By Sandy Johnstone
Of the Emerald

Leaving the security of high school for the uncertainty of college life is a gamble for some first year students, says a University psychology professor. At stake is their mental health.

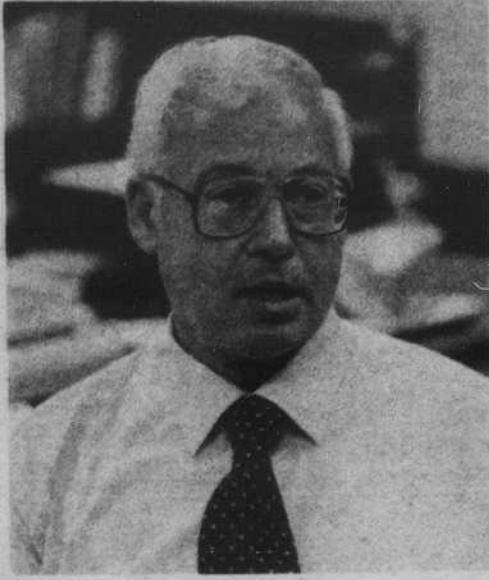
Many new arrivals at the University "are socially uninvolved and have lost many relationships," Prof. Peter Lewinsohn says. "College life is a new, difficult challenge that they're not sure they can cope with. It is a risk for depression."

Social isolation, social withdrawal and feelings of rejection appear to lead to depression, Lewinsohn says. Freshmen also might not have a set direction for their lives so they may have "problems with how they fit in."

In an effort to help depressed students and community members, the psychology department offers eight week classes that deal with problems of depression. The classes will start whenever there are six to eight people interested in them. Currently there are two sessions running and Lewinsohn expects another one to begin in about two weeks.

"The classes are intended to assist people who are depressed or have had depression in the past to learn how they can do things to avoid being depressed," says Lewinsohn.

"Depression results when the quality of a person's interactions with the environment are insufficiently positive," he continues, noting it can occur from financial problems, difficult exams, or failures.



Changing how depressed people think about unpleasant situations is another function of the group. 'You can look at a situation in a positive or negative way,'
Peter Lewinsohn

"We focus on working on the balance of one's activities," Lewinsohn says. "Depressed people tend to have too many unpleasant and not enough pleasant activities."

He advises change — in what they do and in how they think about what they do.

"They can plan their time so they have a number of pleasant things to do and so they won't have to do all the bad things at the same time."

Changing how depressed people think about unpleasant situations is another function of the group. "You can look at a situation in a positive or negative way," Lewinsohn says.

"A person prone to depression tends to focus on the negative. We try to help them adopt somewhat different thinking patterns and habits."

Relaxation will also play an important role in the class. Progressive muscular relaxation involves tensing and relaxing different muscle groups to feel the contrast. The Bentson technique is sitting quietly in a comfortable position and then closing the eyes and repeating one word for 10 to 15 minutes.

The class is run like a small seminar with homework, reading, lectures and class discussion. Lewinsohn stresses that this is not a substitute to therapy but

an "instructional vehicle."

The instructors, usually graduate students in clinical and social psychology, require an interview with each prospective student before the class begins because they want to "get a clear understanding of what the nature of the person's problems are," Lewinsohn says. If a person is suicidal or has another mental problem besides depression, appropriate therapy is recommended, he says.

The group leaders also want to "make sure the students understand what they are getting into. If they are really looking for something else then we want to spell out what the course consists so if they choose to do this they know what to expect."

Typically the course includes both students and community members. "People with a wide range of life experiences and knowledge are experienced there so that might be useful for everyone," he says. "There is a lot of interaction on a problem solving basis."

Cost for the class ranges from \$100 to \$150, depending on income. Evaluating the class after one month and six months will allow the participant to receive a refund for half of their original payment.

The results of the tests which are given at the beginning and end of the class and follow up studies one and six months later are largely positive.

"As a group these students have shown marked improvement (experiencing fewer symptoms of depression) from the beginning to end and maintained this over six months."

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Personals

GERRARD Meet me at 11 am for a pastrami sandwich at Lenny's Nosh Bar in the Courtyard. LOLITA 128.tfn

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