

Arriving on the Westhampton campus as an excited undergrad, I brought the typical gear – bedding and bath supplies, too many clothes, and a minifridge. No one warned me that the transition to college might be stressful; and my packing list hadn't included any of the things that provided me with resiliency and wellbeing on a daily basis in high school – contact with friends and families who knew and loved me, participation in athletics, clubs, church, hobbies, and the comfort of pets, nature, and home. Before long, I met other young women living on my hall in Lora Robins and became involved in Greek Life. Like most college students, I found alcohol to be a quick and ready source of comfort and confidence as I sought to make friends and establish a place of belonging in my new life on campus.

Almost immediately, I recognized that alcohol did not have the same effect on me as it did on those around me. My tolerance was greater than other young women's; and once I had begun, it was difficult for me to stop drinking. I did not understand that my system metabolized alcohol in a way that resulted in less relaxation and reward and greater cravings. Blackouts, and consequences began to stack up along with feelings of confusion, regret, and shame. I was confronted with a dependency on alcohol. With the awareness and support of my family, I was able to access medical help and recovery and stop the inevitable heartache and damage that addiction carries with it.

We know a bit more about addiction than we did when I was a UR undergrad, but that hasn't necessarily made avoiding it any easier. Brain development is still ongoing until the age of 25. College students who engage in binge drinking are especially at risk for developing a substance use disorder. National statistics report 1 in 7 college students meets the diagnostic criteria for a substance use disorder. Research shows that students with a Substance Use Disorder are prone to academic problems, drop out at higher rates, suffer accidents and injuries, commit assaults, are involved in unwanted sexual encounters, have legal consequences, attempt suicide, and are lost to death.

Fortunately, there is also growing awareness of supports that can aid recovery and break through addiction in its beginning stages. Collegiate Recovery Programs (CRPs) provide specialized and peer support to students who are in Recovery and those who may be struggling with substance use or addiction. Early studies suggest students who participate in CRP's have higher retention rates and gpa's than peers, and a low recurrence of substance use. Additional benefits include: positive identity development, social connectivity, sense of belonging, enduring, stable friendships and bonds, internalized feelings of grit/resilience, sense of achievement and agency, coping mechanisms, abilities related to expression, creative and divergent thinking, larger spiritual connections, hope, purpose, and a desire to give back.

Spiders Support Recovery began operating as a Collegiate Recovery Program on the UR campus in Fall 2020. Weekly peer-support meetings, gathering space for substance-free activities, and Recovery Coaching have begun to address the needs of students at UR who seek recovery resources. Recovery Ally Training for members of the UR Community is increasing awareness and decreasing stigma surrounding SUDs and Recovery so that help for others at UR and beyond may become more accessible. A growing group of UR undergraduate and graduate students is reaching out and engaging on a weekly basis as they access resources and support one another. It will be exciting to see how these UR students continue to forge their individual paths in Recovery and create a community responsive to UR's unique cultural needs. I have no doubt that overcoming the challenges surrounding substance use and addiction will lead these and countless, more UR students to translate pain and struggle into purpose, strength, and passion as ways that allow them to reach their full potential and become true assets to this campus community and the world beyond.

*Sarah Clark Wood, Ph.D. WC '90
Recovery Support Specialist -UR Spring 2021*