Leveraging the power of digital health and campus culture to combat loneliness
Caroline Fitzgerald
Lionel Ramazzini

HOPE LAB

GRIT
DIGITAL
HEALTH

Nathaan Demers, Psy.D.
Key Points

- Loneliness is a critical threat to student well-being and success.
- Leverage the power of science and the empathy of design to build effective solutions.
- Building adoption and engagement is a team sport.
Loneliness is on the rise.

Percentage of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders who mostly agree or agree that “I often feel left out of things,” or “A lot of times I feel lonely.”

Many students experience loneliness.

~ 30% Of students reported feeling very lonely in the past 2 weeks

~ 67% Of students reported feeling very lonely in the past year

ACHA National College Health Assessment, 2019
Lonely youth are at heightened risk for...

- Anxiety and depression
- Poor sleep quality
- Drug and alcohol use
- Susceptibility to illness
- Self-harm behaviors and suicidality
- Dropout
Social factors contribute to attrition.

Percentage of students endorsing social reasons for leaving before graduation at a large university:

- 52% I was emotionally depressed or distressed.
- 41% I felt socially alone.
- 29% I felt unwelcome here.

College is a unique opportunity.

“I just want to make friends. I want to not be lonely.”

—Phillip on his hopes for college life

Photo by Gabrielle Lurie

Reverse-Engineering Health

**Technology**
Develop tech experience to engage psychology

**Psychology**
Understand psychological determinants of behavior

**Health Behavior**
Research the behavioral drivers of health

**Successful Outcome**
Create a tool that is...

- Evidence-based
- Scalable
- Students want to use
- Able to be evaluated in an RCT
- Easy to implement
- Is a ROI for institutions
Experts

Adam Cummings
Adriane Broili Borden
Amon Anderson
Amy Manta-Ranger
Arianna Taboada
Becky Ryder
Catherine Teare
Chris McCarthy
Dalia Malek
Elizabeth Markle
Emily Campbell
Fred Dillon
Jamie Gardner
Ji-Ho Park
Julia Bernstein
Juliana Deardorff
Ken Weingardt
Kristyn Pritchett
Leanne Jones
Lee Swain
Libby Craig
Lisa Yee
Manisha Agrawal
Margaret Laws
Megan Johnson
Murray Zucker
Rachel Reichenbach
Rebecca Hope
Robert Ricigliano
Shannon Brietzman
Stephanie Denning
Steven Adelsheim
Tyler Norris
Vicki Zakrzewski
Lea Seigen Shinraku

Researchers

David Yeager
Nick Allen
Ali Minnis
Claire Crooks
Andrew Fuligni
Sonja Lubrimowski
Jennifer Pfeifer
Rebecca Nowland
Bill Bukowski
Ahna Suleiman
Edith Chen
Leah Weiss
Julianne Holt-Lundstead

Grit Digital Health

Andrew Baker
Nathaan Demers
Joe Conrad
Paige Beaufort
Nolan Tesone
Frank Lahtinen
Colin Tackett
Karen McClellan

Hopelab

Denise Ho
Luke Emerdello
Janise Chan
Lionel Ramazzini
Julie Tinker
Emma Bruehlman-Senecal
Caroline Fitzgerald
Danielle Ramo
Arianna Taboada
Lauren Girardin
Chris McCarthy
Jana Haritatos

Strategy

Adina Safer
Timi Leslie
Robby Franceschini
Will Rosenzweig

Cactus

Norm Shearer
Sarah Berkheimer
Thomas Vossler
Brian Watson
Sarafina Persaud
Peter McCarthy
Kevin Roysden
Dayna Safferstein
100+ students
Research Insights

- College will be different
- Meet friends for life
- Friendship should be effortless
Disconnection

- Social environment = threatening
- Can I do something? No.

- Criticize my stuck state
- Take a guarded approach
Got loneliness problems?

We’ve got answers...

Spoiler alert, it’s not a movie night.
1. Destroy the myth of magical friendship
Opportunities

● Destroy the myth

● Tools to Try

● Compassion

● Build the Muscle

● Leverage the Environment

2. Empower with tools to try
3. Process setbacks with compassion
4. Build the muscle over time
Opportunities

- Destroy the myth
- Tools to Try
- Compassion
- Build the Muscle
- Leverage the Environment

5. Leverage the environment for interconnectedness
Psychological Targets

When building connections...
- Hold realistic expectations
- Believe in ability to grow
- Take risks
- Focus attention toward others
- Apply a compassionate lens

Short-Term Outcomes
- ↓ Loneliness
- ↑ Social connection

Long-Term Outcomes
- ↓ Anxiety
- ↓ Depression
- ↓ Suicidality
- ↑ Retention
Featured Challenges

See the potential for deeper friendship

Appreciate someone who made the effort

Instructions:
Say 'hi' to five new people in your dorm or neighborhood

Get in the habit of casually introducing yourself to new people. No pressure to take it further than that. Sometimes people can’t talk right then.
Key Features

1. Testimonials
2. Challenges
3. Reflections
Testimonials

Finding your people in college is hard.

Student Perspective
"I've got the contact info from a couple people I met and we've hung out. It was intimidating, I thought most people would not be interested. But it's turned out all right."

Student Perspective
"I've been intentionally trying to reach out to try to connect. Just to make sure that my friends see that I'm putting in the same effort as they do."
Psychological Targets

When building connections...

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Short-Term Outcomes

- Loneliness
- Social connection

Long-Term Outcomes

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Suicidality
- Retention
Challenges

Acts of kindness
Gratitude
Inviting/initiating
Active listening
Self disclosure
Staying open

Student Perspective
"This made me realize that a lot of students are facing similar stresses that I am, something I never would've realized if I kept my stresses to myself."
Psychological Targets

When building connections...

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Short-Term Outcomes

- ▼ Loneliness
- ▲ Social connection

Long-Term Outcomes

- ▼ Anxiety
- ▼ Depression
- ▼ Suicidality
- ▲ Retention
Reflections

Self-compassion

Reappraisal

Savoring

Gratitude
Reflection

Drag the cursor to respond

How did the challenge make you feel?

Excited
Psychological Targets

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Testing
Testing Health Impact & Engagement

LAUNCH FALL 2019
University of Oregon
Measure the health impact.

LAUNCH SPRING 2020
University of Colorado Denver
Optimize product engagement and experiment with product promotion on campus.
University of Oregon Pilot Trial

**Goal:** Evaluate initial efficacy of Nod

**Who:** 220 first-year college students, recruited through orientation

**Partner:** Jennifer Pfeifer, PhD, Professor of Psychology; Director, Developmental Social Neuroscience Lab
Pilot Trial (n=220)

STUDENTS

Experimental (N=100)

Baseline  2 weeks  4 weeks  8 weeks

Control (N=120)

Baseline  2 weeks  4 weeks  8 weeks
Students are saying...

“It is very calming and it gives great advice. It encourages you step outside of your comfort zone.”

“I think it is beneficial to have the app as a freshman because you can use it to change how you approach situations and it helps to give you a new perspective”

“Nod allows me to think of ways to interact with people that I probably wouldn’t have thought of on my own. It opens more opportunities for me.”

“The app is great and has also been helpful in learning how to relieve stress, as well as a good encouragement tool to go out and make new friends.”
Building adoption and engagement is a team sport.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADMINISTRATOR + STAFF GOALS</th>
<th>HOPELAB &amp; GRIT DIGITAL GOALS</th>
<th>STUDENTS WANT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to promote a culture of connection</td>
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<td>to feel their campus is a place where they can find their people</td>
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<td>to see Nod reach the students who need it the most</td>
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<td>to minimize effort/strain on program staff</td>
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<td>to hear about Nod from their peers</td>
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Strategies

Campus Materials
Posters, table tents, swag

Ambassador Program
Student facilitated events and experiences

Digital Marketing
Paid social
Campus Materials

**WHAT**

Nod Posters - print posters with QR codes pointing students to the app store

Nod Stickers & Pins - swag to promote nod

Nod Challenge Cards - print cards with fun social challenges to preview Nod content

**HOW**

Work with campus comms department to post/distribute materials

**WHO**

Cactus/Grit develop materials to provide campuses

**GOAL**

Normalize and validate student experience, promote growth mindset toward social connection, increase Nod adoption
Examples
Digital Marketing

WHAT
Instagram and Facebook promotions that highlight relatable moments where Nod can help

HOW
Ads are targeted to users based on their location, demographic, and profile information

WHO
Digital ads donated by FB, managed by Grit team, targeting students at the launch campus

GOAL
Increase Nod adoption
Examples

Find yourself and your people with:

Suckéd at small talk.

Download this app if you’ve ever:

Felt weirdly lonely in a crowd.

Gotten homesick for your high school friends.
Ambassadors

WHAT
Student ambassadors equipped with materials host events to promote social connection and the Nod app

HOW
Organize student leaders to bring awareness to Nod

WHO
Students recruited by our team/ the institution

GOAL
Normalize and validate student experience, promote culture of connection, increase Nod user acquisition
Examples

Classroom Pitches

Ambassador led presentations to two core groups:

● 5 minute discussions in classrooms where the topic of building campus community feels appropriate.

● 15 minute discussions with Clubs or Groups where community building feels appropriate.

● Distribute information on Nod and QR codes to download the app if interested.
Examples

Coffee Talks

Set up a space for conversations between two students, staffed and organized by peer educators. Offer coffee and donuts to encourage engagement.

- Use conversation challenge deck with topic starts to help lead conversations.
- Set-up in public spaces where students go to learn about clubs and resources.
- Use stickers, pins, and QR codes noted in the print materials to prompt and track engagement.
Pilot

Goal: Test the impact of campus materials, digital ads, and Ambassadors on Nod adoption

Partner: CU Denver

Outcome: A marketing strategy that yields greatest ROI on adoption of Nod
Discussion

- Given the alignment between student, staff, administrator, and our own goals- what are the opportunities to collaborate to support adoption and engagement?
Stop by our table in the exhibitor area to try out Nod!

To be added to our newsletter:
Email cfitzgerald@hopelab.org

Information on the project:
www.hopelab.org/destroythemyth

Information on bringing Nod to a campus:
www.heynod.com
or email nathaan@gritdigitalhealth.com
Thoughts & Questions
Resources


### Resources

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See the potential for deeper friendship

Appreciate someone who made the effort

Instructions:
Say 'hi' to five new people in your dorm or neighborhood

Get in the habit of casually introducing yourself to new people. No pressure to take it further than that. Sometimes people can't talk right then.
Colors

Bone  Light Green  Light Blue  Light Purple  Light Orange  Light Pink

Dark Bone  Dark Green  Dark Blue  Dark Purple  Dark Orange  Dark Pink

* Gradients can be found in google drive folder
1. Testimonials

"So try and get everyone's numbers and open a group chat. It was the first time I made the first move for a study group and so far it's going pretty well."

2. Challenges

Think they might be interested too?

Invite someone to an event you both might enjoy →

3. Reflections

Take a breather
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Live Demo
Top ten reasons for leaving UW

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<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>I was emotionally depressed or distressed</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>I was not doing well academically</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UW classes were too big</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt socially alone</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was interested in pursuing a degree or training elsewhere</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
</tr>
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<td>I couldn’t motivate myself to work hard in my classes</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not feel I was getting my money’s worth</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other financial reasons</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was worried about taking out loans</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could not figure out what I wanted to major in</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
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MANY STUDENTS EXPERIENCE LONELINESS

~ 30%
Of students reported feeling very lonely in the past 2 weeks

> 60%
Of students reported feeling very lonely in the past year

This is the 2017 data. I pulled the data from the Spring 2019 report on the next slide which is slightly higher for the response to the past 12 month question.
If the things you try have a 5% chance of success...

By the time you try 20 things

64% Chance of success

By the time you try 50 things

92% Chance of success
KEY QUESTIONS

Is there evidence that *Nod*:  
- Decreases loneliness & improves mental health?
- Increases intention to remain at U of O?
- Is being used by the most vulnerable students?

What explains *Nod’s* benefits?  
Are (how are?) students engaging with *Nod*?  
What’s the right ‘dose’ of *Nod*?
LEVERAGING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHANGE

Raise brand awareness on campus
Normalize effort in building friendships
Conduct events that spark connection
Early Surprises

Students want more nudges and notifications.

“I think having daily notifications or reminders could be helpful”

“Send more reminders of the goals I’m trying to achieve.”

“Push notifications to remind to use the app more often”
Got loneliness problems?

We’ve got answers.

(Spoiler alert - it’s not a movie night.)
College is a unique opportunity.

The transition to college presents a unique opportunity to intervene.