

# Healthy Minds Study Pre- and Post- Covid Onset Years: University of Oregon Mental Health Needs and Access

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## Introduction

The University of Oregon (UO) participated in the 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2023 Healthy Minds Study (HMS), a survey-based assessment of mental health status and service utilization among college students. A trend analysis of HMS data was done by UO University Health Services (UHS) and Student Services and Enrollment Management Research and Assessment teams. This trend analysis includes two pre- and two post-COVID onset years.

A qualitative review of UO data suggests increased student need for mental health services, decreased student flourishing when comparing survey results pre- and post-COVID onset years, and increased student self-efficacy to seek services. Increases in anxiety and depression rates, academic impairment, and need for mental health support when comparing survey results pre- and post-COVID onset demonstrate an increased need for mental health services. Already low flourishing levels decreased after COVID onset. Increased rates of help seeking behavior and registered disabilities since COVID onset illustrate higher self-efficacy rates.

The Health Equity Action Project of the Student Health Advisory Committee recommends UO implement changes to increase access of on campus mental health resources given that students need and actively seek care to create a community of students who are supported and share resources with others.

## Key findings

Depression of UO students measured on PHQ-9 scale increased 16% from 2017 (25%) to 2023 (41%). Generalized anxiety of UO students measured on GAD-7 scale showed an increase of 14% from 2017 (23%) to 2023 (37%). There was also seen to be an increase of 15% of UO students reporting need for emotional or mental health problems from 2017 (61%) to 2023 (76%). From 2017 to 2023 UO students saw an increase of academic impairments of 12% (77% to 89%). (Figure 1)

UO students saw an increase in help seeking behaviors with a 12% increase in students deciding to seek help on their own from 29% in 2017 to 42% in 2023. There was also seen to be over double the amount of UO students with a registered disability from 6% in 2017 to 13% in 2023, which is a total of 7% more UO students with a registered disability. (Figure 2)

UO students report lower rates of positive mental health on the Flourishing scale, with only 27% of students reporting positive mental health in 2023 which is a 7% decrease in reported flourishing from 2017 (34%) (Figure 3).

## Methods

UO participates biannually in the HMS, which is an online study created and administered by the HMS research team using the Qualtrics platform. Official recruitment emails with personalized survey links were randomly sent to the UO email addresses of students. The participant's privacy is protected as student identities are never attached to their survey data. The data is securely stored by HMS servers. The survey responses from 2017 represent pre-COVID onset and the responses from 2023 represent the post-COVID onset. The number of invited participants for 2017 was 4,000 and for 2023 it increased to 8,000. The participants throughout the surveyed years were 784 in both 2017 and 2023. A trend analysis of the pre- and post-COVID onset years for the HMS data was performed by UO University Health Services and Student Services and Enrollment Management Research and Assessment teams.

## Conclusion

Through UO participation in the HMS, UO officials received a myriad of information which may be utilized to holistically assess the wellbeing and mental health of their student body, presenting a sound framework to increase student awareness and accessibility of resources. Data suggests increased student need for mental health services, decreased student flourishing when comparing survey results pre- and post-COVID onset years, and increased student self-efficacy to seek services. Further, through assessing student reported mental health status, diagnoses, and frequency of help seeking behavior, comparison between COVID onset and post onset years was established to further underscore the need for amended campus resources. Elevated reporting of anxiety and depression under the GAD-7 and PHQ-9 scales respectively, a reduction in student flourishing, coupled with increased displays of self-efficacy move to convey UO students desire and need for mental health assistance and resources. Through close assessment of HMS data, the trends observed may be addressed through institutional revision of mental health resources available and their accessibility, as outlined within the recommended practices, ensuring the institution's commitment to the comprehensive well-being of the student body.

## Recommendations

In an effort to address the increased rate of anxiety and depression that UO students report compared to pre COVID onset years, we recommend increasing the maximum counseling appointments at the UHS Counseling Center. This implementation will help ensure that such students are able to establish the ongoing mental health care with practitioners that they are actively seeking. This can help ensure students are receiving more effective treatment for their mental health concerns and are not terminating their treatment prematurely as they may be with the current appointment limit.

In response to the increase in UO students help seeking behaviors we recommend to increase student awareness of resources, knowing students need and are actively seeking resources. This could include advertising UHS and health and wellness organizations on campus more at UO tabling events or promoting UHS and its services in academic UO lectures.

We also recommend UO implement more accessibility on campus in response to the increased number of students with registered disabilities.

Such recommendations, as contributed by other members of the health equity action project include:

- ☐ Making campus more accessible, including adding elevators where necessary, maintaining accessible doors and requiring providing closed captions in all UO academic lectures.
- ☐ Encouraging collaboration between the Accessible Education Center (AEC) and UHS Administration in student health affairs

## Figure Key

- Marginally different from pre-COVID onset: \*
- Noticeably different from pre-COVID onset: \*\*
- Considerably different from pre-COVID onset: \*\*\*

## Acknowledgements

Data was administered by the University of Michigan and analyzed by UO UHS and UO Enrollment Management Research and Assessment Teams. The printing of this poster was supported by the Clark Honors College, UO Libraries, and the Institute of Neuroscience.

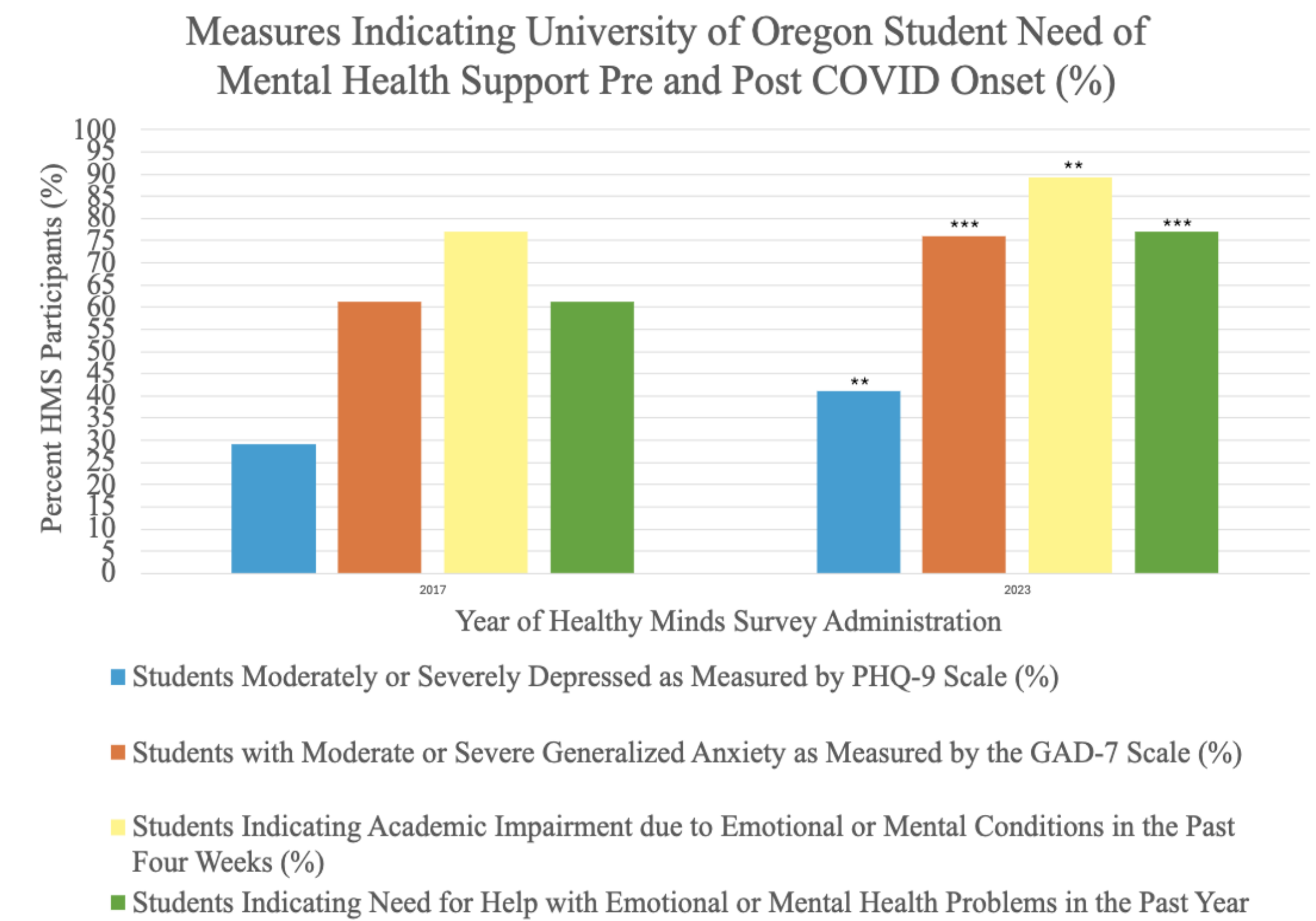


Figure 1: UO Student Need for Mental Health Support

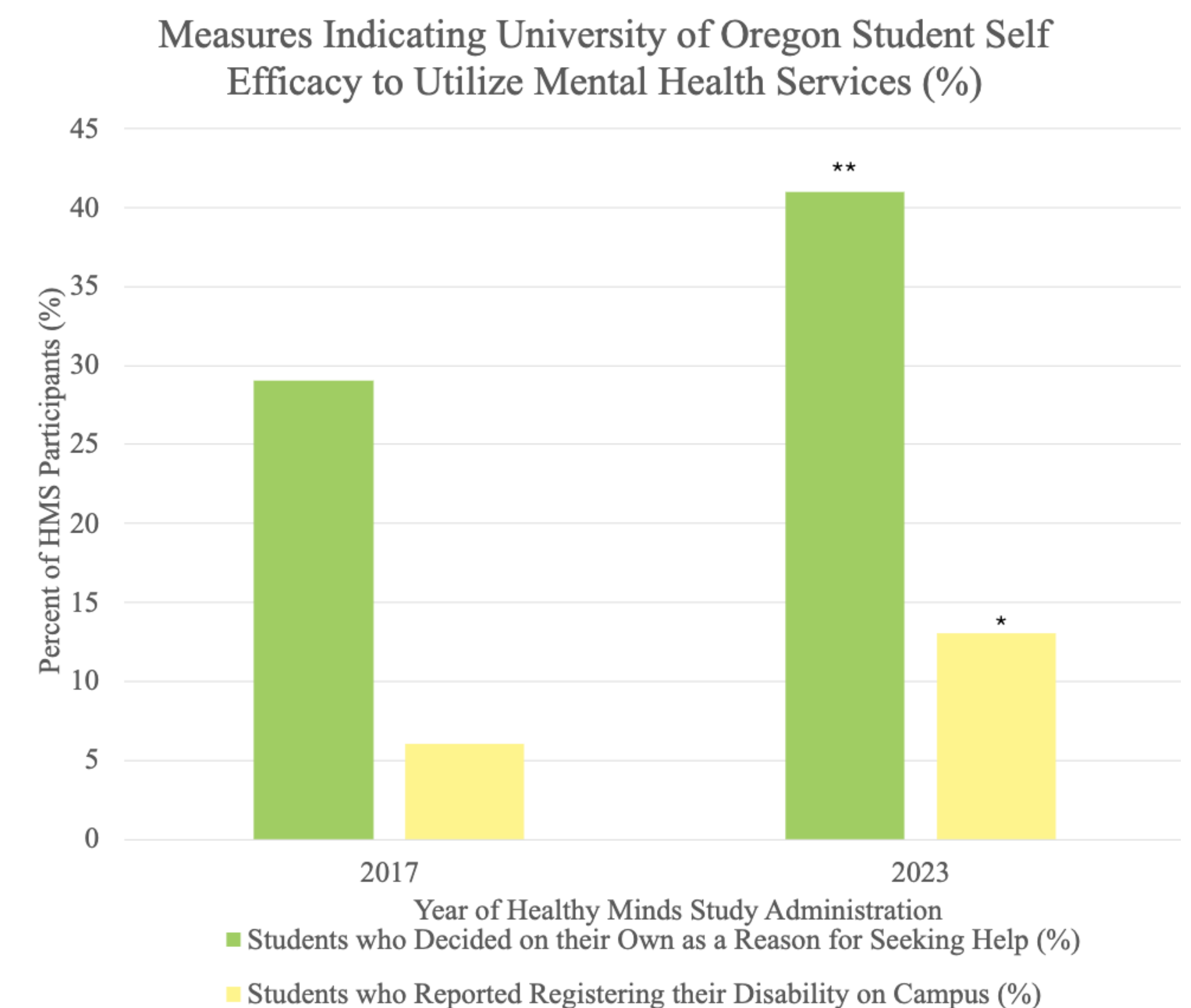


Figure 2: UO Student Self Efficacy to Utilize Mental Health Services

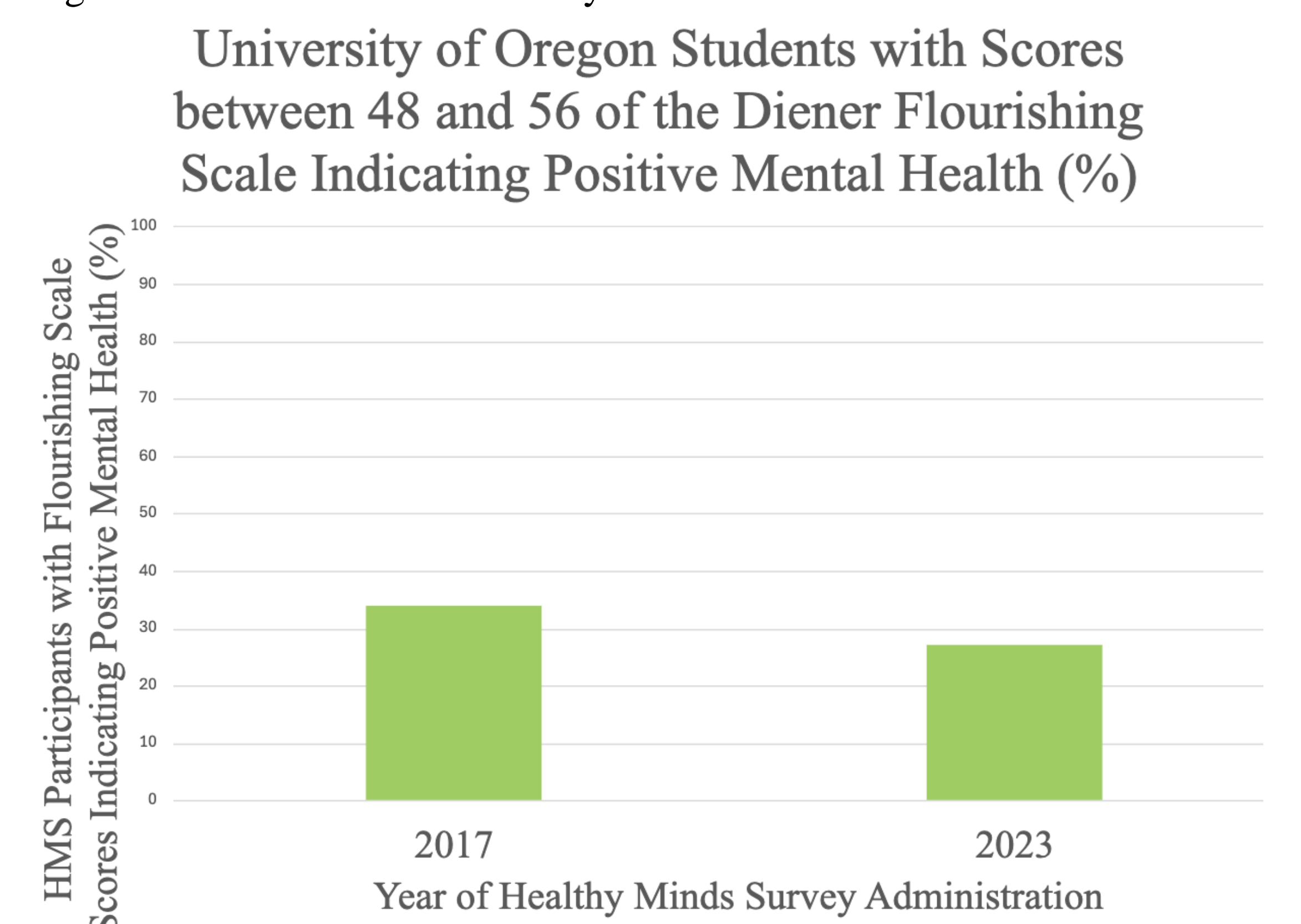


Figure 3: UO Student Flourishing Score on Diener Flourishing Scale