

**The University Senate of Michigan Technological
University**

Resolution 9-22

Resolution to Raise Awareness and Reduce Mental Health Stigma

(Voting Units: All)

Submitted by: the Senate Committee for Promoting and Facilitating Equity and Understanding

Rationale:

The casual use of ableist language in society is so commonplace that it often goes unnoticed. Disorders like obsessive compulsive disorder, depression, and psychosis are trivialized, used as descriptors for fastidiousness, sadness, and behaviors perceived as odd, thereby failing to validate the lived experience of diagnosed individuals. Words like “insane,” “crazy,” “psycho,” etc. are used as catchwords to describe negative traits and dangerous, violent people. This flippant use of language trivializes mental illness, blames individuals for their condition, treats mental illness as a moral failing, and/or brands people with mental illness as violent and unstable.

This language exacerbates the stigma and societal discrimination currently faced by those with mental illness. These societal mechanisms harm people with mental illness by branding them as violent, excluding them from social and mental health support, and putting them in unnecessary conflict with police.

The misconception that people with mental illness are more violent than others, [despite being demonstrably false](#), further ostracizes those in treatment from support networks and makes recovery an unnecessarily harrowing and lonely experience. Due to lack of adequate treatment, [some with mental illness become unhoused](#). Around [one in four](#) people suffering from serious mental illness have been arrested in their lifetime, often for minor nuisance crimes such as loitering. Due to lack of treatment access and lack of crisis intervention training by police, [as many as half of all officer-involved shootings](#) are committed against a person with serious mental illness. Most of these shootings are preventable with proper resources, training, and social support, and that they continue to occur reflects a failure of society to protect a highly vulnerable population. The continued use and promotion of stigmatizing language is a part of this failure.

Despite the sometimes deadly impact of stigma on individuals with mental illness, Michigan Tech has a history of such language in its “crazy smart” branding campaign. Mindpower Inc., the third-party company responsible for the development of the original campaign, uses the tag-line “You have to be crazy to come here” and self-describes their campaign as

containing “some edge” [on their website](#). Despite no longer being used by Admissions, “crazy smart” language can still be found on Michigan Tech’s official web pages, social media, and other marketing content, where future students and employees will get their first impression of our community. “Crazy smart” is also frequently invoked by students in casual conversation and well-known as a University slogan.

Given the [current local mental health crisis \(CW: self-harm\)](#), it would be generous to say that continued use of this phrase is insensitive and careless. Given those prior branding decisions, the University has a responsibility to raise awareness and reduce stigma about mental health and the social marginalization that goes with it.

Michigan Tech must take a more proactive approach to the mental health of students, faculty, and staff. **Thus,**

Whereas, the Michigan Technological University Senate acknowledges the word “crazy” increases the shame around mental illness, and is used as a slur against those with serious mental illness.

Whereas, the Michigan Technological University Senate reaffirms its commitment to fighting ableism and other forms of systematic oppression.

Whereas, the Michigan Technological University Senate objects to all current and previous use of “crazy smart” in marketing campaigns or branding by the University, its departments, and any individual operating as an agent of the University.

Whereas, the Michigan Technological University Senate observes Michigan’s Upper Peninsula is undergoing its own mental health crisis and seeks to assist in any way feasible.

Therefore, be it...

Resolved, the Michigan Technological University Senate calls upon the University to create and disseminate policies and procedures to remove all existing instances, and eliminate future use of “crazy smart” branding from all official web pages, social media, and other marketing content.

Resolved, the Michigan Technological University Senate asserts that people with serious mental illness deserve access to the same education and health services as all other students, employees, and faculty at Michigan Technological University.

Resolved, the Michigan Technological University Senate affirms the rights of all those with mental illness to be able to be treated with dignity and respect, without fear of isolation, violence, or death.

Resolved, the Michigan Technological University Senate demands that the University offer suicide prevention training (e.g., [Question, Persuade, Refer](#)) as part of essential safety training for all supervisors, and employees with regular contact with students.

Resolved, the Michigan Technological University Senate demands the University improve existing emergency mental health services for students by creating evidence-based protocols for handling mental health emergencies (e.g., a trained [Crisis Intervention Team](#), or a [Managing Mental Health Crisis Program](#)).

Resolved, the Michigan Technological University Senate demands the University supply on-campus emergency mental health services for faculty and staff, similar to those provided for students.

Resolved, the Michigan Technological University Senate calls upon the University to develop [peer support programs](#) to empower [students](#), faculty, and staff to help support one another.

Resolved, the Michigan Technological University Senate calls upon the University Leadership to work with the Center for Student Mental Health and Well-being and other experts in mental health to provide education about mental health for the campus community and cultivate a sense of belonging for those living with mental disorders.