A sophomore art and design major at Michigan, Candy Wei killed self in January

Associated Press

DETROIT — The mother of a University of Michigan student who killed herself in January is questioning whether colleges are adequately serving clinically depressed and other mentally ill students who need help.

Candy Wei, a sophomore art and design major from Durham, N.C., was curled in the fetal position on her dorm room floor when she pulled a plastic bag over her head and face and suffocated.

For years, she had lived with schizophrenia and a mood disorder characterized by hallucinations, a lost sense of reality and alternating feelings of euphoria and depression.

Wei, 20, responded to treatment to earn a 3.8 grade point average at Michigan. She reengaged in November, got additional treatment, but killed herself Jan. 18.

Wei’s mother, Jing Wang, said many of her telephone calls and e-mail messages to counselors and psychiatrists weren’t returned, and that doctors canceled or pushed back appointments with her daughter.

Wang, a professor of Chinese cultural studies at Duke University, said when her daughter visited the school’s Counseling and Psychological Services center by herself, she was told she would have to wait a week for an appointment, even after indicating she needed immediate help.

“There was no sense of urgency,” Wang told The Detroit Free Press for a report Monday.

Todd Nuriel, director of CAPS, declined to comment on the specifics of Wei’s case, citing university confidentiality rules. But in a letter to Wang, university officials said they will form a four-person task force to examine her daughter’s case.

The concerns come while university officials say they are seeing an increase in students with serious mental problems. Meanwhile, some mental health staffs aren’t growing to handle the new demand.

“We are definitely seeing more and please see CARE.A2
more students with severe mental pathology than we've seen in the past," said Eleanor Rossi, a psychologist at Michigan State's Counseling Center.

Reasons include heightened academic pressure, a greater need for students to juggle school and outside jobs because of higher tuition and unraveling of the traditional family structure.

The International Association of Counseling Services recommends a ratio of one counselor to about 1,500 students. A Free Press survey of major Michigan campuses found most didn't come close to that ratio.

The University of Michigan has one psychiatrist and eight counselors for its 30,000 undergraduates, a ratio of one for every 3,333 students.

Wayne State University, with 31,000 students, has no psychiatrist and two full-time counselors. John Crusoe, director of counseling services, said the university plans to add three counselors this year, bringing the ratio down to one for every 6,200 students.

Eastern Michigan University has 24,000 students, three psychologists and a part-time psychiatrist, for a ratio of about one per 6,857 students.

Michigan State has a ratio of one counselor or psychiatrist to every 1,867 students. Students there have to wait six weeks on average for a first appointment with one, according to Ann Flescher, assistant director for Clinical Operations and Services.

On the Net:
Candy Wei memorial site,
http://www.humancomp.org/
candy-wei/

University of Michigan CAPS,
http://www.umich.edu/~caps/