In a Fight Against Depression, UCLA Relies on Technology

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In what amounts to a research moonshot, the University of California at Los Angeles aims to "cut the burden of depression in half" by 2050 and to eliminate it by the end of the century.

But before the university starts treating the world, it's begun treating its own students.

In a study conducted since last year as part of the [Depression Grand Challenge](#) — an interdisciplinary research project that adopts the popular ["grand challenge"](#) format to solve major social or scientific problems — UCLA researchers have used an online program to measure the anxiety and depression levels of nearly 4,000 students.

In about 12 to 15 minutes, students who volunteer to take the screening tests are categorized on the basis of mild to severe depression, anxiety, or suicidal thoughts. The university then uses those classifications to route students to appropriate mental-health treatments.

Roughly 45 percent of the students whom UCLA has screened since January 2017 have been identified with at least mild levels of depression or anxiety, says Michelle G. Craske, director of the university's [Anxiety and Depression Research Center](#) and a member of the study's executive committee. About 23 percent of those student have used the campus counseling service. Like many college mental-health services, Craske says, UCLA's are "overwhelmed with demand."

"The students are needing more than they can get from the services provided — and we have excellent services," she says.