Mental illness alliance to come to UL

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The National Alliance on Mental Illness, which has an Acadiana chapter, will now have a chapter at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, adding a student voice to the mental health movement.

The organization was recently established by Dominique Rosado, research coordinator for the Office of the Vice President for Research, Innovation and Economic Development.

"My personal struggles with familial mental illness fueled my drive to bring NAMI here to campus as founder and staff adviser," Rosado said in an email. After Rosado's brother was diagnosed with schizophrenia, her family realized the lack of resources for those affected by mental illness. They searched for years and finally found the education they needed from NAMI Acadiana.

"The local chapter of the organization is where my family and I finally found the support, hope and educational resources that we'd been aimlessly searching for," Rosado explained. "We finally felt like we weren't in this alone."

After discovering NAMI Acadiana, Rosado knew the UL Lafayette campus needed a chapter to target college-age students living with mental illness, as well as students who are a family member or caregiver of someone suffering from mental health issues.

In October 2014, Rosado set up an interest booth at NAMIWalks Acadiana to gauge the interest of student participation in a chapter at UL Lafayette.

"I was pleasantly surprised at the interest and overwhelming excitement for participation," Rosado said. Rosado met two psychology majors who wanted to help establish the chapter. "Immediately we connected and the fire in our hearts was lit," Rosado exclaimed. "They wanted to be a part of it just as much as I did."

Student members will work to end the negative stigmas surrounding mental health with the hope that more students will be able to talk about mental health and get the help they need.

Organization president Ashley Legnon said she joined NAMI on Campus to educate and empower people with mental illnesses to accomplish their goals in life. "Life is too short and beautiful to let anything hold you back from becoming the person you want to be," Legnon said.

This fall, NOC will be participating in the annual NAMIWalks Acadiana, at the River Ranch Town Square. Students can register online at www.namiwalks.org.

NOC will also be holding a suicide prevention activity on Wednesday, Oct. 12, from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. in the Quad.

The goal of the activity is to bring awareness to the reality of suicide on college campuses by displaying backpacks to represent the student lives lost to suicide every year.

To increase involvement, NOC will allow any university individual to sponsor a backpack memorializing someone lost to suicide, and if he or she wishes, to provide information, such as a picture or story about their loved one.

On a day-to-day basis, NOC will advocate research, services and support for students while encouraging them to achieve academic success at UL Lafayette.

"We know that some of the best support a student can receive is from peers," Rosado said. "NAMI on Campus will help to make those connections happen."

Students can get involved with NOC this year by joining the Facebook group "NAMI on Campus — University of Louisiana at Lafayette," or by emailing namioncampus@louisiana.edu.