

# Undergraduate Stress and Anxiety: Academic performance & suicidality at UF

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## Introduction

- ❖ Mental health disorders are widespread among college populations with approximately 30% of university students scoring high on mental health assessments, the average prevalence of depression being 30.6%, and suicide being one of the leading causes of death among university students.
- ❖ The purpose of this study was to:
  - determine the greatest health concerns of undergraduate students.
  - identify the prevalence of undergraduate students reporting stress and anxiety as an impediment to academic performance
  - identify changes in the proportion of students who are considering suicide

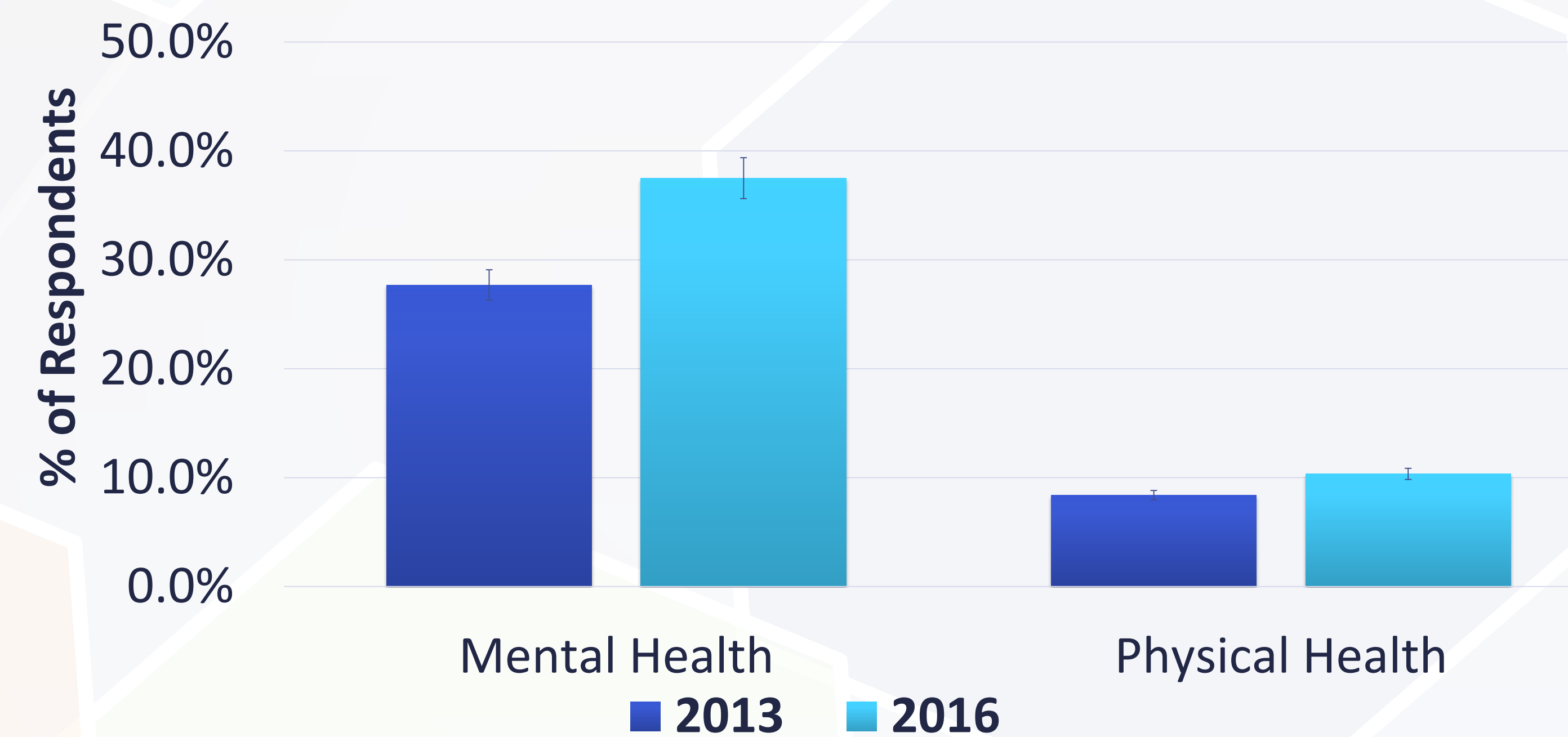
## Methods

- ❖ The Healthy Gators Student Survey was created by the Healthy Gators Coalition in 2007 and is disseminated through GatorWell Health Promotion Services.
- ❖ A random sample of 7,500 undergraduate students, over the age of 18, with local addresses on file with the Registrar's Office was compiled by the Office of Institutional Planning and Research.
- ❖ An informed consent and electronic survey link was sent via e-mail to the sample of undergraduate students, both outlined that the first, middle, and last 10 participants to complete the survey and the incentive contact form would receive a Visa gift card valued at \$50.
- ❖ A total of 1221 undergraduates in Spring 2013, 1511 undergraduates in Spring 2016 completed the survey.
- ❖ In the 2016 dataset, the majority of respondents were female (72.3%) and the mean age was 20.16 years. Participants identified as White (76.3%), Asian (12.0%), Black (5.6%), Multiracial (5.2%), and American Indian or Alaskan Native (0.9%). There were no Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders in the dataset.
- ❖ Study data were summarized descriptively and two-population proportion z-tests were used to determine differences in prevalence of health behaviors. Thematic analysis was used to analyze open-ended responses to the question, "What is the single greatest health concern affecting your life right now?" Analyses were performed using Minitab 17.

## Results

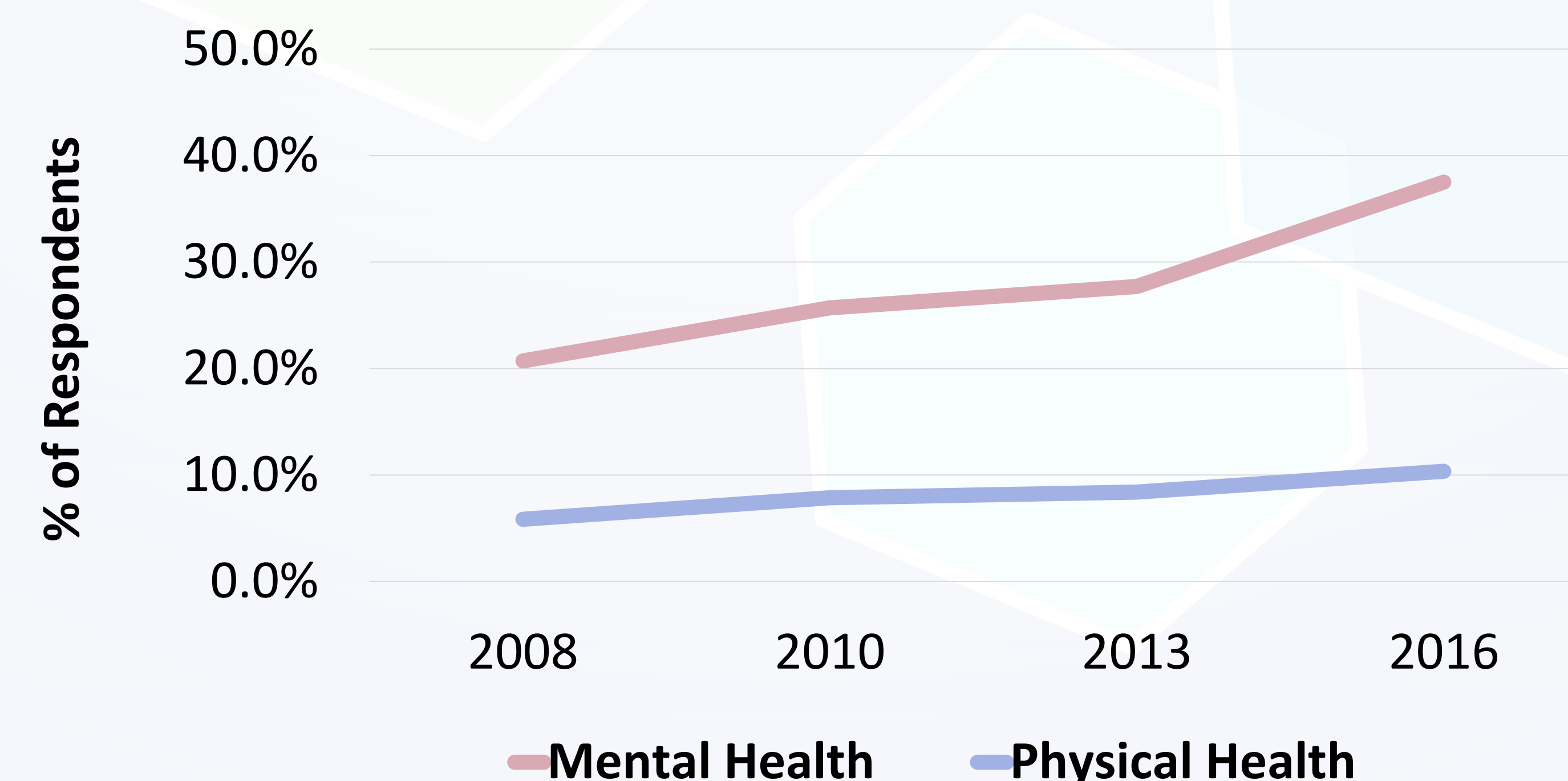
- ❖ The greatest health concern of undergraduate students at UF is stress and anxiety. Furthermore, stress and anxiety were the most reported impediments to academic performance.
- ❖ In 2013, 27.7% of undergraduate students reported having seriously considered leaving the University due to poor mental health, at least one time; whereas, only 8.4% of undergraduates reported having considered leaving the University due to poor physical health (Figure 1).
- ❖ In 2016, 37.5% of undergraduates reported having seriously considered leaving the University due to poor mental health; 10.3% considered leaving for poor physical health.

**Figure 1: Comparison of Student Health Related Retention, 2013 & 2016**



- ❖ The 2016 rates of students seriously considering leaving the university due to poor mental health are 9.8% higher than those reported in 2013 ( $p < 0.000$ ). As shown in Figure 2, since 2008 there has been a general upwards trend in the proportion of students reporting considering leaving the University due to mental health concerns.

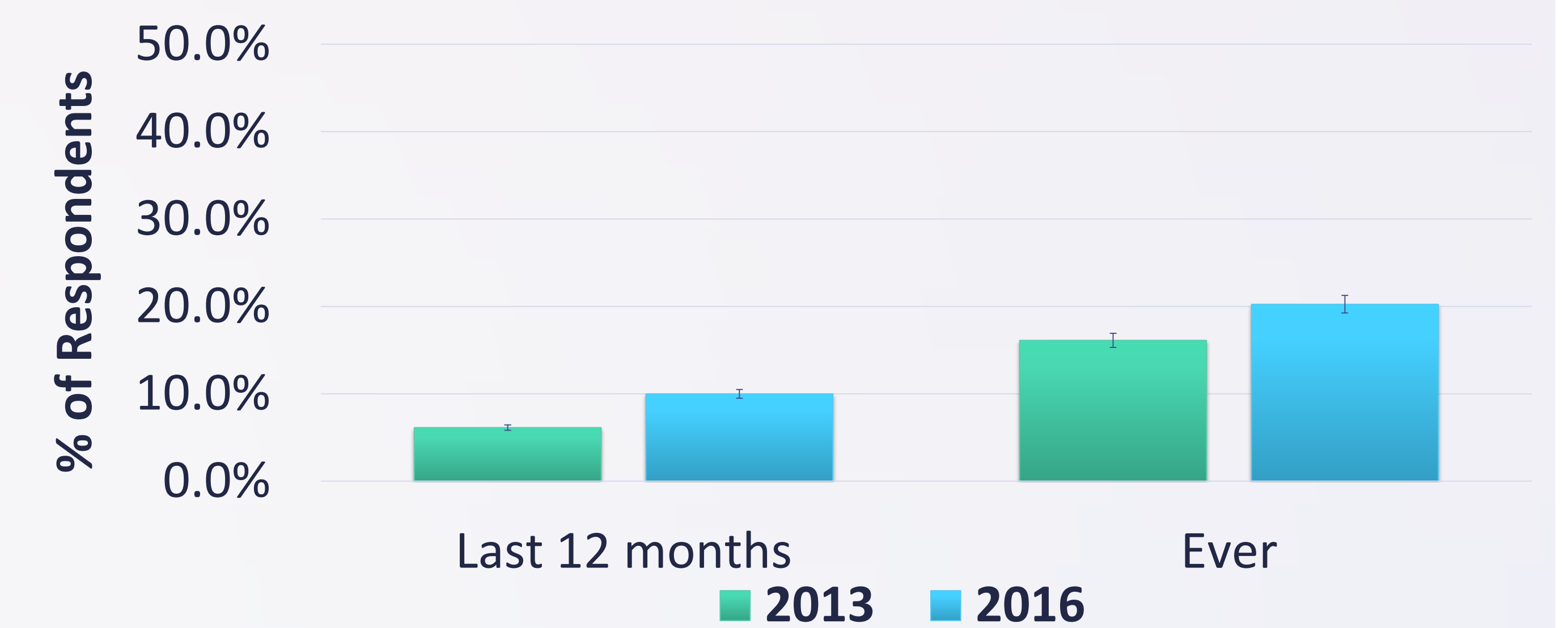
**Figure 2: Comparison of Student Health Related Retention, 2008 - 2016**



## Results

- ❖ In 2016, 10.0% of students had seriously considered suicide in the 12 months prior to the survey. This is a 3.9% increase in the proportion of students seriously considering suicide since 2013 ( $p = 0.013$ ). Figure 3 compares the proportion of students who have ever considered suicide and those that have considered it in the last 12 months; across 2013 and 2016.

**Figure 3: Comparison of Considering Suicide, 2013 & 2016**



## Implications

- ❖ Negative mental health outcomes can impact college students' academic performance, retention, and matriculation. Results support the continued need to address mental health issues among the UF student population utilizing a comprehensive approach from prevention to treatment.
- ❖ According to published research, addressing stress and anxiety related concerns leads to improved academic success and decrease in mental health diagnoses.
- ❖ The Division of Student Affairs can use this data to prioritize protective behaviors specifically to improving students' mental health such as:
  - Help students develop resiliency skills
  - Promote involvement in university activities and organizations
  - Increase social support
  - Provide relevant connections for students to find personal meaning or purpose in their college experience
  - Promote self-efficacy in which students believe that their individual effort matters
  - Increase access to mental health services
- ❖ Special attention should be focused on students who are experiencing increased suicide ideation as this may lead to a higher frequency of completed suicides in the student population.