Overview

These workshops were designed to reach out to the entire graduate school community and discuss critical areas of concern underlying stress, anxiety, and depression.

Extended the project of PFTF fellow Rosalyn Earl’s 2012 project identifying 5 core areas of graduate concern.

Workshops were 90 minutes long and structured into a presentation segment and a group discussion of the day’s topic.

The goal of my project was to address issues that compromise mental health and well-being, present resources that are available to all graduate students, and generate ideas collaboratively with peers about future events that would benefit the graduate community.

The Workshops

1. Social Isolation 4/20/2017
   Presenter: Dr. Bai-Yin Chen, Staff Psychologist, Student Health and Counseling Services (SHCS)

   Students were presented with strategies to buffer against loneliness, including self-care, support networks, and advice for navigating various social interactions in academia.

   Students engaged in fruitful discussion of how they overcame their own social anxiety and exchanged helpful advice/suggestions for social outlets, such as clubs, sports, support groups, and volunteering opportunities.

2. Financial Difficulties 4/27/2017
   Presenters: Michael Carrizales & Dolores Christensen, Doctoral Psychology Interns, SHCS

   Group discussion with speakers and UAW representative in attendance covered TA salary/accessibility, and health care.

   Students were presented with resources addressing food scarcity (Aggie Food Connection; The Pantry), loan repayment and consolidation, and external/internal funding opportunities.

3. Research Obligations 5/3/2017
   Presenter: Michael Carrizales & Dolores Christensen,

   Students were eager to discuss stress and anxiety stemming from research deadlines, writing anxiety, advisor demands/expectations, imposter syndrome, and guilt/procrastination.

   Select resources presented: dissertation support group, Healing Through Connections (graduate student therapy group), mindfulness meditation, writing labs, and time management apps.

4. Family Obligations 5/10/2017
   Presenter: Dr. Bai-Yin Chen

   Topics discussed covered effective communication with family, managing family expectations, and work-life balance.

   Select resources presented: child care services, family care grants, care advantage, Davis Joint Unified School District Free Pre-School program.

5. Relationship w/ Graduate Advisor 5/15/2017
   Presenter: Dr. Bai-Yin Chen

   Topics discussed covered expectations between student and advisor, communication strategies, handling negative interactions, and finding support from faculty/department.

   Select resources presented: Department/Grad group chair, Counseling Services, Office of Ombuds, Grad Studies, and Academic Affairs, as well as Harassment and Discrimination Assistance and Prevention program.

Feedback & Future Directions

Select quotes from workshop evaluations:

“The workshop was interactive and supportive”

“I’m really happy this even exists, to take this topic out of the shadows and allow us all to work towards something better”

“I’m grateful to know my experience is not unique”

“I would like to see these workshops for faculty. My advisor does not understand my struggle”

“This is needed because some graduate students have poor mental health. The idea we are just ‘bad’ at coping mechanisms and need more training is wrong!”

Suggestions from students for moving forward:

Adding graduate student centered events to the UC Davis Mental Health Initiative’s in their yearly May schedule (currently not included)

Financial instability was commonly discussed and attendees were adamant about TA wage concerns and further work reforms.

Extending healthcare/other campus services to immediate family without cost.

More parent child activities and family services/financial support.

A Mental Health seminar/course for students to take/participate in

Summer therapy support groups and more workshops on self-care strategies.

Institutionalizing workshops as mandatory events for Welcome Week or an integrated part of TA orientation.

Inclusive events that address mental health among faculty in order to help shift the narrative/stigmas of this topic for faculty and students alike (also joint faculty/student events).

Events that allow safe spaces for students to publicly discuss their interactions with faculty/advisors.

Departments allowing students to review advisors/faculty mentoring and effectiveness.

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to Dr. Bai-Yin Chen as well as Michael Carrizales and Dolores Christensen for the roles as guest speakers and for their helpful and supportive advice to our workshop attendees. A special thank you to Teresa Dilling and JP Delplanque for the encouragement and leadership. I also thank Professors for the Future for this opportunity and my cohort for our stimulating discussions.