One Size Does Not Fit All:
Developing meaningful wellness programs for graduate students

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Overview

- Unique Needs of Graduate Students
- Institutional Challenges
- Graduate Mental Health Statistics
- Graduate Division Counselor
- Protective Factors
- Campus Resources
- Preventative Approaches to Graduate Wellness
The Unique Needs of Graduate Students

- Rigorous academic programs
- Faculty advisor expectations (on time and performance)
- Non-traditional student characteristics
  - Student parents/caretakers
  - Older students
  - Underrepresented students
  - International students
- The development of a professional persona/reputation in addition to training
- The linkage between the academic and the personal at the graduate level → we need to rethink our approach
Institutional Challenges

• Campus services are undergraduate-focused

• Information silos: academic units vs. service providers
  – Lack of communication between these units impacts how graduate student cases are handled
Institutional Challenges

UCI graduate students present concerning statistics:

- **17%** - Graduate students estimated to screen-in for Axis 1 mental health disorders
- **15%** - Graduate students estimated to experience substance abuse
- **43%** reported knowing another graduate student whose academic performance was impaired by major mental health problems
- **43%** reported that they needed help or were told that they needed help
- **25%** reported engaging in counseling/use of medication

Data from UCI Mental Health Survey – UCI Graduate Division, 2008)
How Issues Are Identified:

- Consultation Team: UCI crisis management group
- Academic Units
- Graduate Division
  - Quarterly grade checks
  - Exception requests
- Student self-referral
The UCI Model: A Graduate Division Counselor

- In 2011 the Graduate Dean identified need for a bridge resource between the student, the department and other campus resources. Position evolved from part-time to 100% dedicated counselor.
- Clinically trained counselor, but NOT working as a clinician
  - Can require students to meet with the counselor – especially if academic need is demonstrated
- Performs case triage, referrals to other service providers
- Provides link between service providers and academic units
- Works in conjunction with the UCI Consultation Team
- Can be accessed by students, faculty and staff alike
The UCI Model: A Graduate Division Counselor

- With tie to central academic unit, can mitigate impact of personal issues on academic profile

- Access to a range of administrative records, such as graduate application to inform case work
Characteristics of the Current Caseload

• Predominately consists of:
  – Women
  – Underrepresented minorities
  – International Students

• Sampling of reasons students meet with the Counselor:
  – Case presented by the Consultation Team
    • Often entails long-term monitoring/tracking
  – Faculty referrals to Counselor → students of concern
  – Difficulty communicating with faculty advisor
  – Experiencing overwhelming personal difficulties
  – Difficulty making academic progress due to various forms of anxiety
Graduate Counselor: Campus Collaborators

- Does not supplant existing services
- Operates as a hub for graduate student cases
- Communicates with various service providers, including:
  - Campus Clinical Social Worker
  - Academic units (Associate Deans, faculty, staff)
  - Campus legal counsel
  - Counseling Center
  - Office of Student Conduct
  - Disability Services Center
  - Graduate Resource Center (GRC)
  - Housing...etc.
Building & Supporting Protective Factors

- Activate and reinforce student’s support network of faculty, staff and peers
- Encourage student to rely on outside support networks such as family (if there is a positive relationship) and other friends
- Encourage student to schedule downtime to help improve motivation, coping skills and a healthy work-life balance
Building & Supporting Protective Factors

- Encourage student to maintain structured support as needed

- Increase awareness of resources among STEM students
  - Significantly less likely to be aware of UCI’s services than non-STEM

- Maintain timelines and expectations set in action plans and contracts
  - Maintaining structure protects the student by helping them understand expectations
Proactive Wellness Approaches

- New Graduate Orientations
  - Campuswide New Graduate Orientation – Year 7
  - International New Graduate Orientation – Year 5

- GRC “Life Skills” workshop series

- Emphasis on career planning and professional development
  - Dissertation Boot Camp
  - Mentoring Excellence Program
  - Foundations of Teaching
  - “Activate to Captivate” / Public Speaking
  - Graduate Professional Success
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