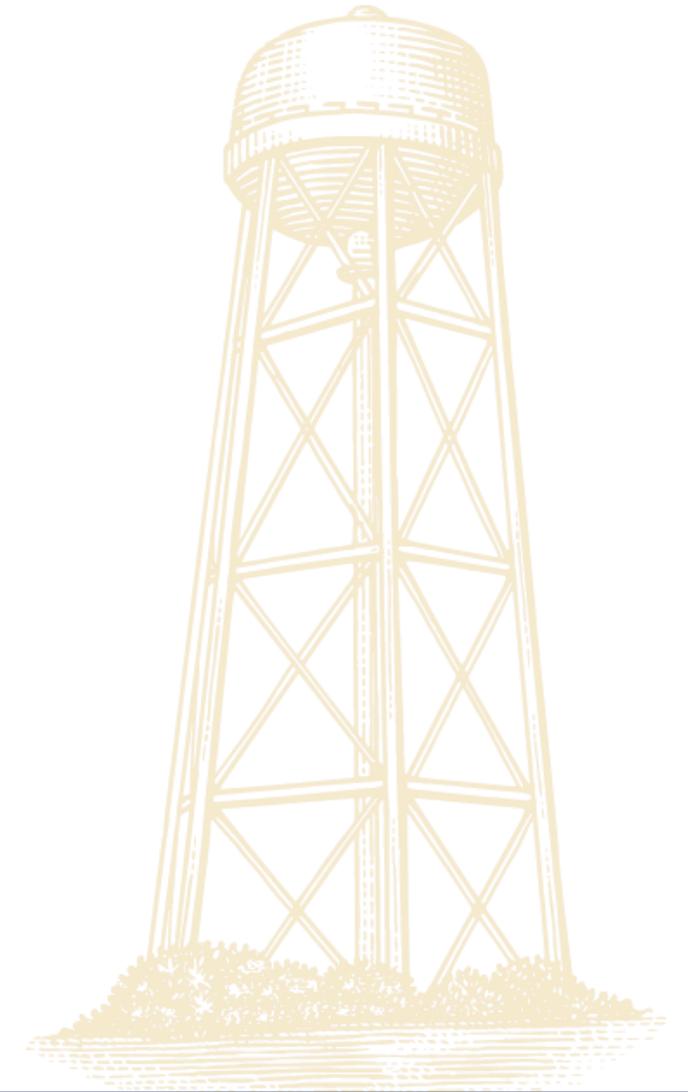


# Paths to Recovery: Strategies for Fall Reintegration

**Advising Graduate Students Conference**

Carolyn Dewa, Elizabeth Sturdy, Sydney Sullivan

September 1, 2021



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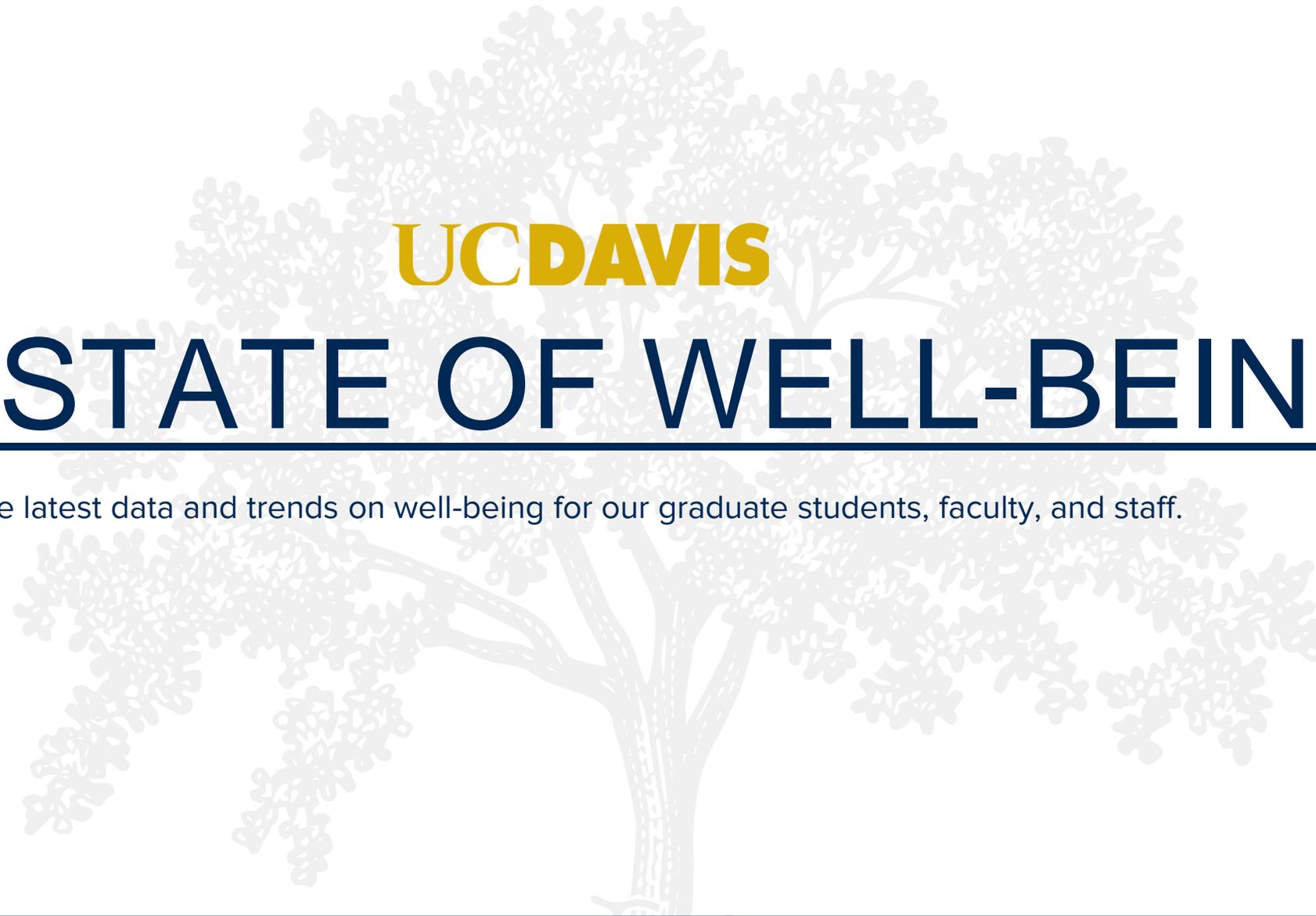
# AGENDA

● THE STATE OF WELL-BEING

● FALL REINTEGRATION

● WELL-BEING INITIATIVES

● QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



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# THE STATE OF WELL-BEING

The latest data and trends on well-being for our graduate students, faculty, and staff.



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# COUNCIL OF GRADUATE SCHOOLS REPORT (2021)

Currently, one-third of graduate students report symptoms consistent with PTSD anxiety or depression. Anti-blackness, COVID related disruptions, and career uncertainty are all factors.



# NATIONAL COLLEGE HEALTH ASSESSMENT-UC DAVIS GRADUATE STUDENTS

- Only **62.1%** of students agree or strongly agree with the statement: “At my college/university, I feel that the campus climate encourages free and open discussion of students’ health and well-being.”
- Only **58.8%** of students agree or strongly agree with the statement: “At my college/university, we are a campus where we look out for each other”

## Survey Responses from Students Enrolling in Thriving in Graduate School:

“A community of peers committed to wellbeing.”

“I am not sure, I think the biggest thing I hope to gain is community.”

“A support network of people going through similar things as me.”

Stress negatively affected **43.3%** of students academic performance in the last 12 months



# UC GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY (2021)

## Most frequent behaviors and feelings:

- Moving more slowly
- Trouble focusing
- Tired all the time
- Restless sleep
- Unable to shake off the blues
- Sad

## Impact of COVID:

- 59% reported to making progress as expected (no delays due to COVID)
- 16% delayed by one term
- Research was the biggest degree milestone impacted
- 32% were dissatisfied with their interaction with other students
- 28% were dissatisfied with their own engagement



# UC GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY (2021)

- Advising and Mentoring:
  - 78% were satisfied with department communication of resources and support mechanisms
  - 75% were satisfied with the mentoring by their faculty advisor
- Community
  - 56% felt there was a strong sense of community in their graduate program
  - International students reported a stronger sense of community in their programs (68%)



# THE ROLE OF FACULTY IN STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

- Two in 10 professors agreed that supporting students in mental or emotional distress has taken a toll on their own mental health.
- 30% of professors report having two or more symptoms of depression.
- 51% of professors have a clear understanding of how to recognize a student in emotional or mental distress.
- 69% of faculty would like additional professional development on student mental health.

Lipson et al., *The Role of Faculty in Student Mental Health*, 2021.



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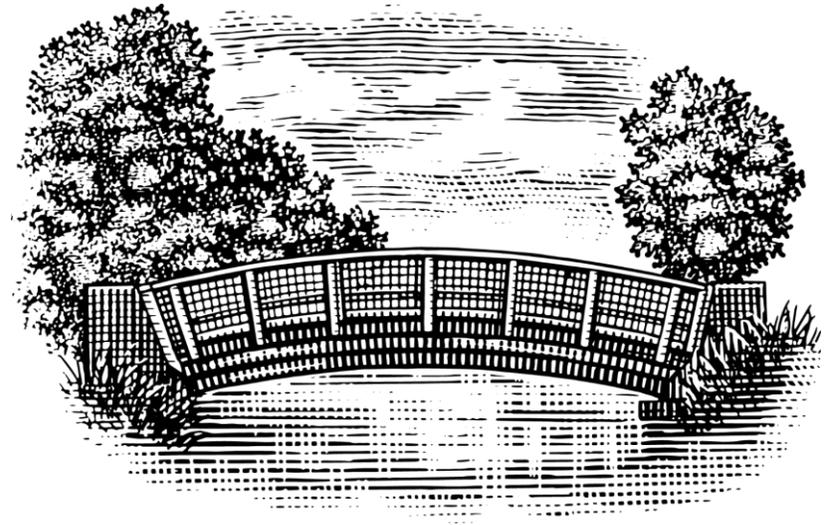
# CHALLENGES FOR STAFF & FACULTY

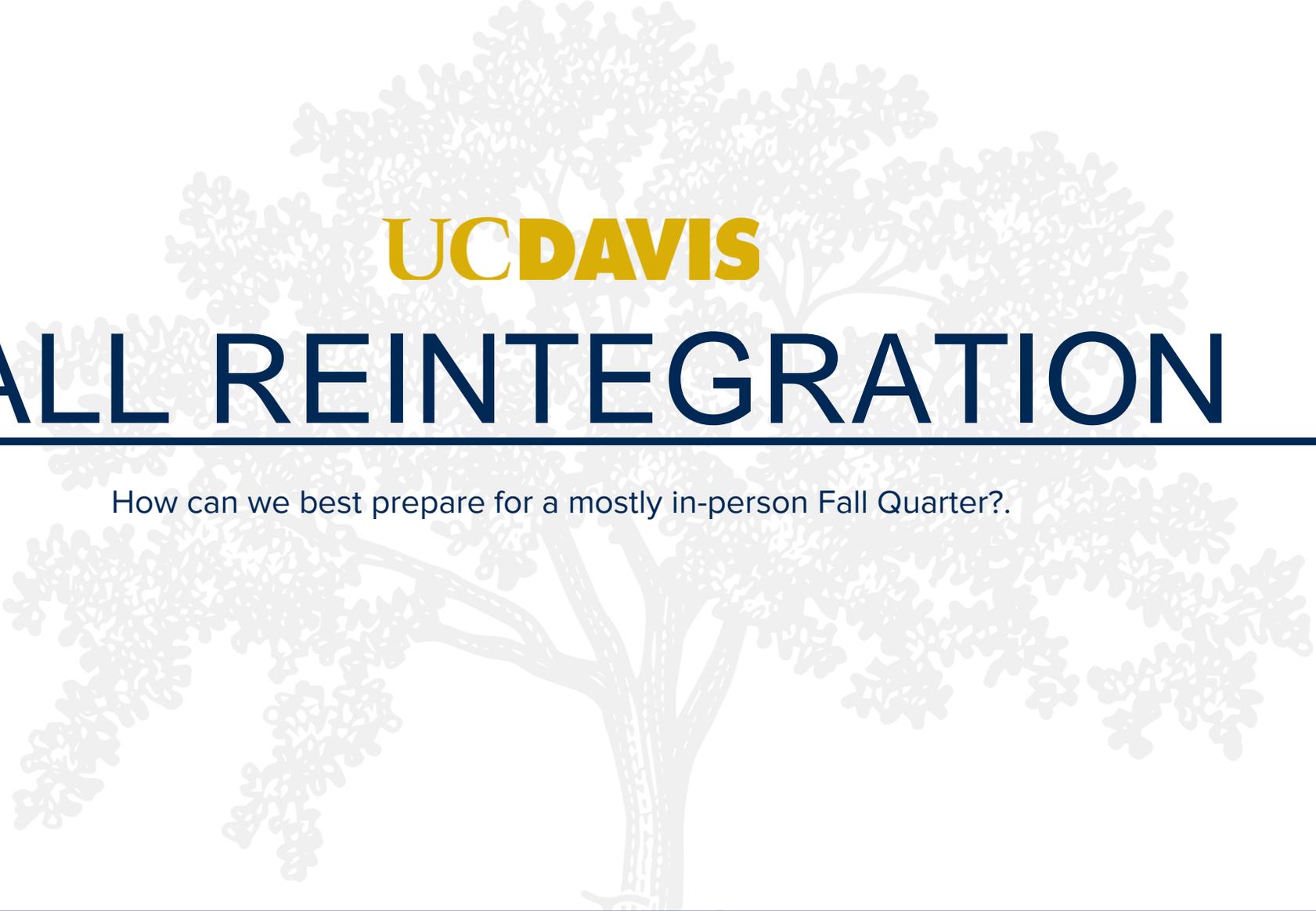
- Role strain: Increased workload and demands
- Burnout
- Depression/anxiety
- Caregiving duties
- Compassion fatigue
- Lack of agency over employment conditions
- Lack of resources (technology especially)



# BENEFITS TO MAINTAIN

- More flexibility and accessibility
- Increase in accommodations
- Increase in empathy in advising and mentoring
- Greater commitment to equity
- Use of holistic review doubled in the pandemic





# UCDAVIS FALL REINTEGRATION

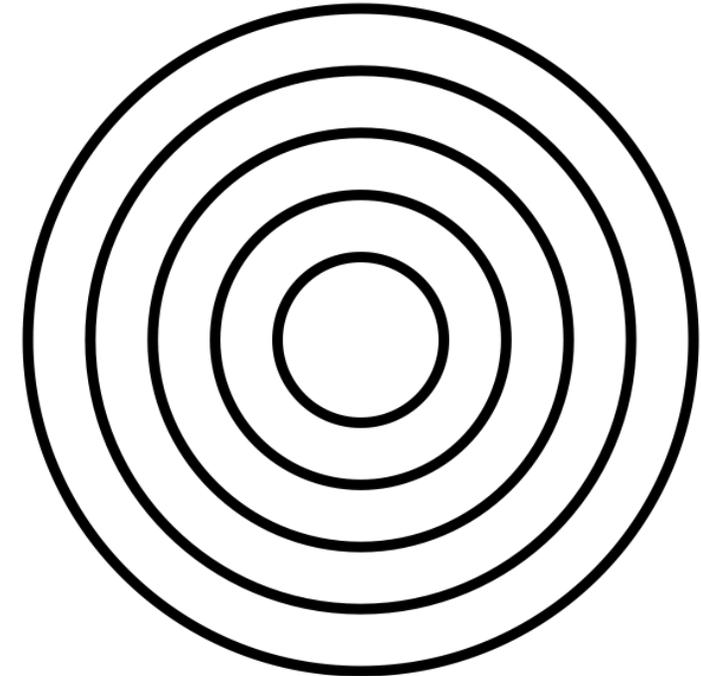
How can we best prepare for a mostly in-person Fall Quarter?.



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# SUPPORT NETWORKS

- During a crisis, we turn to our innermost circle for support (friends, family).
- Close relationships prevent depression and burnout, increase well-being, and comfort during times of uncertainty.
- We tend to rely on our inner circles when we should also reach out.
- Contacts in our networks often yield more solutions and information.
- Graduate students should also reach out to advisors and mentors to receive valuable support.



King, Marissa, *Social Chemistry*, 2021



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# CONNECTING IN PERSON

- Interacting in person leads to more connection
- In-person interactions (eye contact, hand on a shoulder, etc.):
  - Lower stress
  - Increase energy
  - Increase mutual regard
  - Result in more resiliency
  - Create a stronger sense of belonging



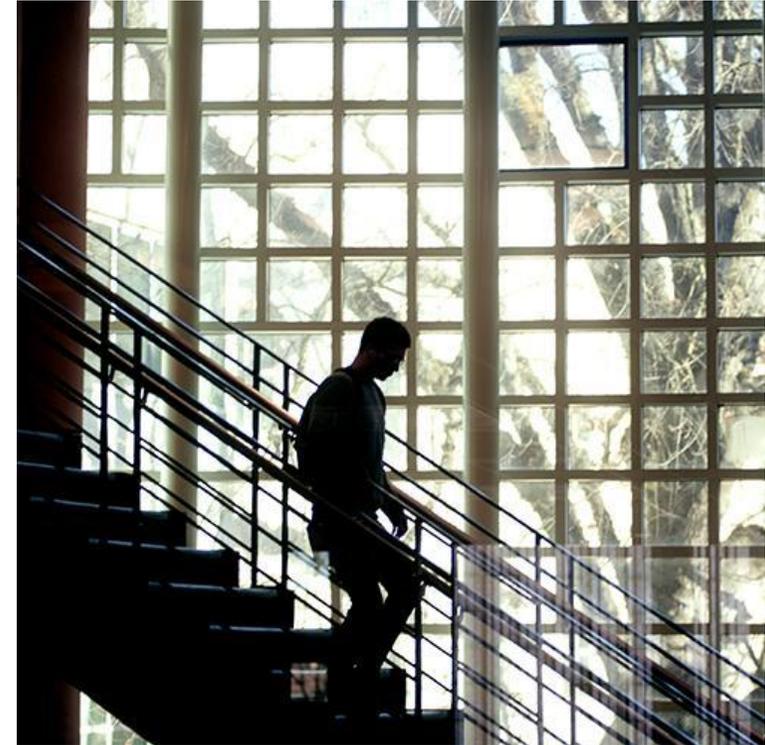
(Stephens et al., “High-Quality Connections,” 2012).



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# REINTEGRATION CONCERNS

- Stress and fear with Delta variant, risks of exposures
- Post-traumatic stress from previous year
- Low capacity for in-person interactions, social skills challenges
- Concerns about ability to receive accommodations or flexibilities
- Anxiety or stress related to teaching/researching in-person
- Parents/caregivers stress



# STRATEGIES FOR ADVISORS/MENTORS

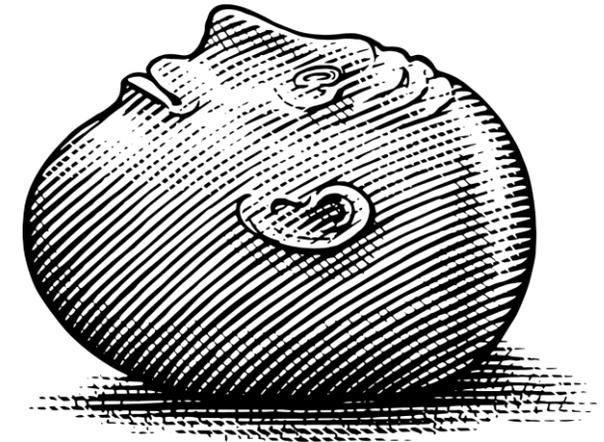
- Be mindful of those still heavily impacted by the pandemic (not a “return to normal”)
- Play a preventive role, get resources out early
- Practice compassionate listening (listening to allow someone to simply vent)
- Identify areas the student can control
- Provide accommodations or flexibilities when possible
- Establish manageable routines (for students and self)
- Have open discussions of your own work-life balance/self-care, model and remove stigmas

“Empathy is not connecting to an experience. Empathy is connecting to the emotions that underpin an experience” - Brené Brown



# HOW TO RECOGNIZE STRUGGLE

- Changes in behavior, appearance, or what is being communicated
- Withdrawal
- Since 2017, 1400 staff and faculty have taken Gatekeeper Training. These trainings will be offered this year.
  - There are two trainings in the series:  
(1) Mental health promotion and recognizing mental illness (2) psychiatric crises



# STRATEGIES FOR PROGRAMS

- Provide a reorientation for all students to discuss reintegration and resources
- Create community building opportunities regularly: lunch/coffee hours, parent groups etc.
- Offer specific in-person opportunities for second year students (COVID cohort)
- Institute a wellness committee
- Institute a well-being course
- Offer trainings for graduate students, faculty, and staff to identify warning signs- need a network of support within a program to recognize and refer





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# WELL-BEING INITIATIVES

The latest well-being initiatives for 2021-2022.



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# THRIVING IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

“Thank you so much for the support throughout the quarter!”

“Wonderful program, I am so happy for everything I've learned.”

Over 80 graduate students in different disciplines across campus have already joined. Current survey data suggests that what students are looking for the most from this program is “community.”



The flyer features a blue header with the title 'Thriving in Graduate School' in white. Below the header is a photograph of a smiling male graduate student in a hallway, wearing a blue plaid shirt over a white t-shirt with a UC Davis logo. To the left of the photo, text describes the program's goal to help graduate students cultivate well-being. A list of benefits includes receiving weekly emails, learning tools for well-being, being invited to a virtual community, and attending community building events. A quote on the right states: 'Balancing the demands of life as a graduate student can be stressful and challenging, but you don't have to do it alone. Join a community of staff and students that are here to help you thrive.' At the bottom, there is a QR code and a link to join the program: bit.ly/ucdtgs. Logos for UC Davis Student Health and Counseling Services, UC Davis Graduate Studies, and UC Davis Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are also present.

Join **Thriving in Graduate School** to learn how to cultivate well-being in your personal, academic, and professional life.

By joining Thriving in Graduate School, you will:

- Receive **weekly emails** with tips to help you incorporate well-being practices into your life
- Learn tools for creating conditions for **well-being** in group spaces like labs, classrooms, and organizations
- Be invited to a virtual community to stay connected and **share your experience** with one another
- Attend community building events

*Balancing the demands of life as a graduate student can be stressful and challenging, but you don't have to do it alone. Join a community of staff and students that are here to help you thrive.*

Join Thriving in Graduate School: [bit.ly/ucdtgs](https://bit.ly/ucdtgs)

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Join Thriving in Graduate School: [bit.ly/ucdtgs](https://bit.ly/ucdtgs)

Contact Sydney Sullivan for Flyer: [scsullivan@ucdavis.edu](mailto:scsullivan@ucdavis.edu)



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# GRADUATE WELL-BEING COURSE

## Tools for Becoming a Successful Professional and for Enhancing Your Well-Being and Work Environment

A 298 seminar developed by Professor Carolyn Dewa (Public Health Sciences, Psychiatry, and Behavioral Sciences)

The 5-week sessions cover:

- Evaluating the latest mental health and well-being scholarship
- Promoting self-efficacy and self-care
- Using effective problem-solving
- Approaches for conflict resolution
- Addressing work environment/work-life balance



# GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCES

## **Usual coping mechanisms are not as effective when they get to graduate school**

... since joining grad school I have noticed a significant rise in my propensity to suffer anxiety attacks, along with a decline in my ability to cope and manage such emotions/reactions.

## **Feeling overwhelmed**

...I feel overwhelmed most of the time. And a bit hopeless, that being in grad school is a long grind and I somehow have to make it.

## **Graduate school is wearing**

Another insight during the course was that I feel as though I'm tired of this.



# GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCES

## **Graduate school can be discouraging**

I experienced a collapse last week due to a paper submission deadline. The night before the deadline I stayed up late and went to sleep at 6:30 am. I couldn't fall asleep at all because I felt ridiculous --- I shortened my sleeping time just for some work that was not significant at all. I asked myself: who in this world, except for myself and maybe my advisor, would care about my work at all? And Why am I devoting that much time and energy to such an insignificant paper? I felt it was just worthless, the only reason I had to do it was I had spent almost two years on that project and I needed to get it done.

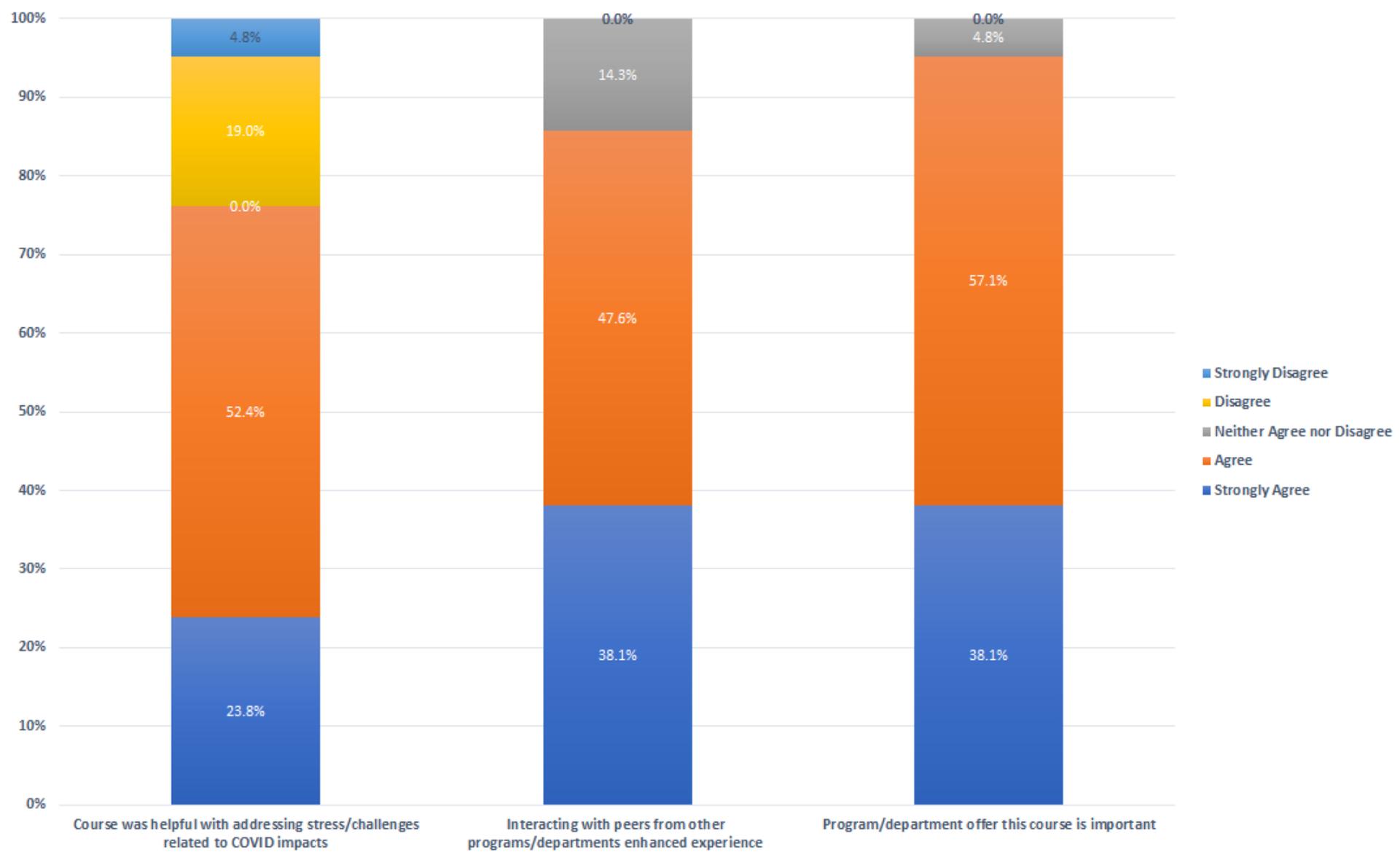
## **There is constant self-doubt**

Every success feels like a total shock and every failure feels like it is to be expected.

## **There is no time to reflect**

This evidence is especially beneficial in academia, where success can feel ephemeral given the never-ending pace of work.





# IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

The fact that this course was offered also reaffirmed to students that self-care is important. This led to taking breaks and finding they were more refreshed and ready to take on a task. Students also identified the importance of self-reflection.

One student explained, “Overall, I would say the wellness course didn’t necessarily introduce any new concepts or techniques that I have not encountered before in my life. I think the best thing about the course was just being forced to sit down and think about the stress going on in my life and the ways to deal with them in a more organized fashion.”



# NOT ALONE

Students also found the course was useful because they had an opportunity to discuss their concerns with peers. They felt reassured that they do not need to have all the answers and they learned from one another as they shared their experiences.

As one student described, “What was most apparent to me was this notion that we often take these concepts for granted as principles of common sense. However, the recognition and open discussion of these ideas (and how to address them) is a reassuring – and in my opinion, necessary – addition to graduate education.”



# BENEFITS OF THE COURSE

The scientific literature was used to support the course topics:

- I really appreciated the **data-informed**, emotionally intelligent approach of this class. The **scientifically-backed information** on mental health concerns presented in this class **did a great job in legitimizing these issues and providing evidence-based solutions**.
- The **opportunity to discuss these topics with other students** in the class helped **normalize them, and also made me feel less alone** when it came to the issues that I personally experience.
- I feel that the tools from this class will **help me handle my stress better, navigate the graduate student/PI relationship** more confidently, and hopefully **perform better** in situations that make me nervous, like public speaking and my eventual qualifying exam.

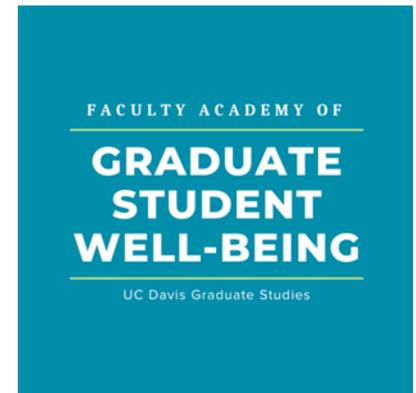


# FACULTY ACADEMY OF GRADUATE STUDENT WELL-BEING

Faculty will learn to teach similar courses within their own graduate programs.

## This program will:

- Expose faculty to critical scholarship on well-being.
- Teach faculty how to design and instruct graduate student seminars on mental health and well-being within their own graduate programs.
- Provide community and consultations for faculty.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the program and course.
- Enhance faculty well-being.



# GRADUATE MENTORING INITIATIVE (GMI)

- A new faculty mentoring program designed to foster an engaged culture of mentoring across all disciplines
- Led by UC Davis faculty facilitators (Mentor Fellows)
- Cohort model
- Six sessions:
  - Aligning Expectations
  - Maintaining Effective Communication
  - Addressing Equity and Inclusion
  - Enhancing Work-Life Integration
  - Promoting Research Independence
  - Articulating Your Mentoring Philosophy



**GRADUATE  
MENTORING  
INITIATIVE**

UC Davis Graduate Studies

**OCTOBER 2021 PROGRAM COMING SOON!**



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, Associate Dean for Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Scholars
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- Pamela Lein, Professor
- Graduate Mentoring Initiative Advisory Board
- Chancellor's Graduate and Professional Student Advisory Board (CGPSA)
- Graduate Studies
- Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, College of Biological Sciences, College of Engineering, College of Letters & Science, School of Law, School of Medicine, School of Veterinary Medicine





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# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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What questions do you have for us?



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