

Student Mental Health Innovative Approaches

Graduate and Professional Students Work Team Final Report Winter 2023



Work Team Introduction

This Work Team brought together students, staff, and faculty from a number of schools/colleges to discuss challenges to mental health and well-being for graduate and professional students on the Michigan campus.

Executive Summary

Graduate and professional student mental health is a significant concern on campus. Schools and departments across campus appear to recognize this and have implemented various preventive and responsive strategies. These include offering peer support, embedded CAPS counselors, and courses. Questions remain about best approaches, including whether coursework should be required or optional. Different programs have different time to completion (e.g., 1 year masters programs vs. 5+ year doctoral programs), and many have little spare room in their curricula, so there is unlikely to be a suitable one size fits all approach. The College of Engineering C.A.R.E. Center offers a promising framework, as it utilizes a case management approach to coordinate student access to academic advising, mental health counseling, and assistance with myriad logistical and concrete concerns (e.g., immigration issues, housing problems, etc.). It is possible that other schools and programs could implement something similar, perhaps by pooling resources across departments that lack the resources or size to have their own program but whose students have similar needs. Or Wolverine Wellness could be a centralized location for such services.

Work Team Membership

Include Work Team Chair / co-Chairs

Joshua Kay (Law School), Arthur Verhoogt (Rackham/LSA)

Include Work Team membership [name, role, unit representation]

Caroline Lehman, Caroline Logue, Claire Collins, Claire Liu, Elizabeth Bottorff, Erin Zimmer, Mami Horikawa, Meghan Duffy, Nicole Banks, Reena Sheth, Soojin Kwon, Susan Guindi, Vicki Ellingrod, William Zhang , Raj Mangrulkar

Work Team Charge

Include a problem statement / What was this work team asked to examine?

The charge of the work team was to research what different schools and colleges are already doing to support graduate and professional student mental health and well-being, and discuss whether any of these interventions would be scalable to other schools/colleges/programs.

Work Team Timeline

Please include meeting frequency, start/end date

Work team meetings every 6 weeks from Fall 2021 to Fall 2022. Work Group Co-Chairs continued to meet in Winter 2023.

Data Review & Collection

What data has your Work Group reviewed to help inform your scope of work and future recommendations?

The Work Team collected and reviewed several syllabi that provide students with skills and resiliency to help support their mental health and well-being.

- Pharmacy (Wellbeing for Professional Success; Personal “Phinance”)
- School of Information (student led)
- MBA 620 (Leading a Good Life)
- Law (Designing a Fulfilling Life in the Law; Dialogue Across Difference; Lawyering While Female)
- Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (LSA) - EEB 800 – minicourse developed as part of Rackham’s Wellbeing Advocate program

A Work Team co-chair also interviewed the coordinator of the College of Engineering’s C.A.R.E. Center.

Has your Work Group created and deployed surveys or used other methods to collect data (individual and/or group interviews)?

No.

Deliverables | Accomplishments | Work In-Progress

Deliverables	Accomplishments	Work-in Progress	Resources Needed

Recommendations

Include your recommendation and which entity is best equipped to implement (i.e., the Well-being Collective, Dean of Students Office, Provost's Office, Financial Aid, etc.)

- 1) Skills-based training in the form of mini-courses and full-semester classes focused on building resiliency and skills needed to be successful in the graduate/professional curriculum and beyond. To create such a course, schools and departments must define what skills are needed/expected. Units interested in creating similar programs should consider whether some modules within existing programs can be utilized because they are general enough.

Challenges:

Is the training curricular or extracurricular? Required or optional? How to staff such courses? Different lengths of degree programs, some being quite short (e.g., 1-year master's programs). Work team noted that some graduate program curricula are already packed, making it difficult to require additional courses, and optional programming is often underutilized. There was some preference for optional programming with the thought that it would be likely to plant seeds regarding mental health, with students becoming ambassadors to the broader student body. Another challenge may be in determining how to assess the success of such interventions.

- 2) Share campus resources to support mental health and wellbeing during first year orientation of all professional and graduate students. But also create a decision tree to help students decide which resources would be most beneficial to access. Websites and apps may be useful. So might having case managers through Wolverine Wellness for professional/graduate students (Possible model: C.A.R.E. Center in College of Engineering). Could social work student interns assist as part of their field placement provided supervisors can be found?

Continuity Assessment

Please indicate who, if anyone, on the Work Team would be willing to continue this effort.

Many members of the Work Team moved on (graduation, other positions) so new membership may be needed.

Conclusion

Several schools and departments have curricular wellness offerings or offer services such as embedded CAPS counselors or peer support. Students in different programs across campus likely have different needs, and the schools and departments themselves may have disparate challenges in meeting these needs (e.g., some students are on campus a long time, others relatively briefly; schools and departments have different resources at their disposal; some programs have little room in their curricula). It is difficult to determine whether required vs. optional curricular offerings are the better approach, and it seems clear that no one approach will work for students across all schools and departments. The case management approach utilized by the College of Engineering C.A.R.E. Center is inherently flexible and promising. Offering similar services in other schools or departments, or through Wolverine Wellness, could provide a great deal of needed support to graduate and professional students across departments.