SUPPORTING GRADUATE STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLNESS

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Student Wellbeing at UBC

2013 – Student Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy

2015 – co-hosted international conference (with UNESCO, others) → Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges

2016 – adopted Charter; committed $1M; created UBC Wellbeing unit

2017 – Graduate Student Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy

Effective mental health services
Early identification of problems
Supportive environment, awareness, self-management
A few initiatives:

- Expanded, improved, mental health services
- Created centralized Early Alert enterprise system
- Reviewed, embedded wellbeing principles in policies, curriculum, orientation, onboarding
- Increased mental health ‘literacy’ (for all), promoted self-management, development, resources
- Created student-centric spaces
- Promoted healthy food, fitness; enhanced athletic facilities

wellbeing.ubc.ca
Graduate Student Wellbeing

Pre-existing conditions
Predispositions
Academic abilities
Coping abilities
Personal circumstances
Identity

Grad School Environment

*Wordle from 2016 survey
Graduate Student Wellbeing

**student-oriented**

- **Pre-existing conditions**
- **Predispositions**
- **Academic abilities**
- **Coping abilities**
- **Personal circumstances**
- **Identity**

- Ensure effective, tailored mental health services, promote awareness, destigmatize (among students and faculty/staff)
  - e.g. alternative counselling venues, staff/faculty ‘first-aid’ courses
- Enhance self-managed mental health and awareness
  - e.g. workshops (imposter syndrome, procrastination)
- Enhance academic abilities (and/or make right admissions decisions)
  - e.g. academic English, statistics
- Provide accommodations, assistance as possible, needed
  - e.g. parental leave, FT-reduced workload
- Encourage development/fulfillment of identity(ies)
  - e.g. IDPs, counselling, student-centric educational practices (incl. Reimagining the PhD)
Graduate Student Wellbeing

Grad School Environment

- Finances
- Academics
- Reliance on single mentor
- Isolation
- Unsupportive environment
- Hard work, long hours
- Ramifications for family/social life
- Unpredictability, challenge in research
- Big/risky investment in life (esp. international)
- Uncertainty in career
- ? Meaningfulness

Mitigating strategies (& on their own merit)

- Increased funding, min. stipend policy
- Academic support (e.g. ESL, writing)
- Enhance supervision, expand mentors
- Enhance community opportunities
- Prevent/address issues
- Expectations agreements
- Community groups, accommodations
- Self-care, realistic expectations, support
- Career support; graceful ways out (e.g. PhD to master’s)
- Career support, reimagining PhD
- Reimagining PhD, career support, IDPs, community
Graduate Student Wellbeing

*environment-oriented*

- Offer/arrange workshops, resources
- Facilitate conversation and strategizing to improve wellbeing

Grad programs

Grad Studies

UBC Wellbeing

UBC Health Promotion & Education
Graduate Student Wellbeing

Environment/student-oriented

Identity
- students in transitional spaces often with conflicting (or non-existent) signals, supports

Now I'm just overeducated and underexperienced and what am I meant to do with that?

I often feel like I am on an island

I felt misled by the university with regards to the dysfunctional culture of higher education

My current research is not going to help me to get a job in the fields I am interested in.
Identity

Reimagining the PhD / Public Scholars Initiative

- Supports student-driven collaborative dissertation research with external (or alternative academic) partners; broadened scholarly approaches, including knowledge mobilization; broadened dissertation content/format – towards the public good

*It allowed me to imagine possible career paths*

*It helped to authenticate my research identity as one which focuses on public engagement and good*

*It legitimized my pursuit of a career outside of the academic trajectory*

*It provided a sense of backing and seriousness. I became something more than just a student.*

*I feel more strongly about this project than any other I have worked on in my dissertation*
Graduate Student Wellbeing

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Graduate Student Wellbeing

The state of [institutions] and the policies they undertake will influence individual flourishing. However, individual health, relationships, life satisfaction, purpose, and...virtue will also contribute to the strengthening of the institutions that allow a society to thrive.