Overview

- Graduate school can be stressful and overwhelming. A recent study found 37% of Master’s students and 47% of PhD students meet the basic criteria for depression and anxiety and this incidence has risen in the past decade.
- A strong mentorship network has been linked to decreased anxiety and depression as well as increased student performance, retention, and well-being.
- One form of mentorship that often overlooked is peer or near-peer mentoring (Figure 1).

Program details

- Peer mentors engaged in year-long mentorship training facilitated by group discussions once per month and professionally-led workshops once per quarter.
- Group discussions on topics such as:
  - Stress management strategies in graduate school
  - Imposter syndrome
  - Mental health issues and resources

The workshops:

1. Enhancing listening skills from an ecological perspective
   Presenter: Dr. Mónica Torreiro-Casal, Psychology Postdoctoral Intern, Student Health and Counseling Services

2. Mentoring 360: Developing full circles of mentoring relationships
   Presenter: Dr. Steve Lee, Graduate Diversity Officer, Office of Graduate Studies

3. Recognizing and responding to distressed and distressing students
   Presenter: Dr. Bai-Yin Chen, Staff Psychologist, Student Health and Counseling Services

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the workshop presenters and cohort of peer mentors who volunteered their time for this project. I also want to thank the 2015-16 group of PFTF fellows as well as Teresa Dillinger and JP Delplanque for their support and feedback on the project.

References

Professors for the Future, 2015-2016

PFTF Fellow: Matthew Savoca
Program: Ecology
Major Professor: Gabrielle Nevitt

Project Title: "Developing a Graduate Student Peer Mentorship Program."

Project Summary:

Academics often cite graduate school as the best time in their careers. And yet, despite all the wonderful things graduate school has to offer, there will also be stressful, overwhelming, and unnerving moments. The causes are innumerable and unique to each person, but have no doubt, every graduate student will encounter them; the question is, how to get through it?

For me, having a great support system of family and friends has been critical; however, an official peer support structure for graduate students at UC Davis is lacking. For this reason, as my Professors for the Future service project, I initiated a graduate student peer mentorship program, using the Graduate Group in Ecology (GGE) as a pilot group. Over the year, I organized three workshops and monthly discussion-based meetings where a collection of highly motivated GGE students, interested in enhancing their mentoring skills, have been preparing to become peer mentors for students entering the graduate program next year.

Thus far, I have connected peer mentors with prospective student mentees so the incoming cohort of GGE students will be prepared to hit the ground running when they arrive in Davis for the first time later this fall. By the end of the year, I will have also created a peer-mentorship training toolkit that other graduate programs can adopt and use to develop their own peer mentorship systems. My hope is that this program will be continued after I graduate and will augment and improve the recruitment and retention of early-stage graduate students in the GGE and UC Davis as a whole.

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