

EXAMINING PERCEIVED STRESS AND SUPPORT IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY  
GRADUATE PROGRAMS

A thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Western Carolina University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Specialist in School Psychology.

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May 2020

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank my committee members and chair. Dr. Boan-Lenzo has been a source of support in so many ways—from providing help with data analyses to reminding me that there is life outside of graduate school. Dr. Schilling has always offered and provided helpful resources and was immensely helpful in developing my qualitative analyses. Dr. Unruh has not only helped me through providing resources and guidance for the summer research grant I obtained to complete this work but she helped me reach every goal that I set out with and has truly helped me to grow as a researcher and a psychologist.

I would also like to thank Nicole Zelhofer, a cohort member and a dear friend who is going to do extraordinary work as a school psychologist. I also extend my most sincere thanks to the following people, without whom this thesis would not have been possible: Dr. Melissa Himelein, Bradley Guilliams, Tracy Anderson, James Anderson, Carol Dweck and Andy Hull.

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## ABSTRACT

### EXAMINING PERCEIVED STRESS AND SUPPORT IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATE PROGRAMS

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There is a major shortage of school psychologists in the U.S. and to improve this, school psychology graduate programs need to graduate more students (Walcott, Hyson, & Loe, 2017). One consideration for school psychology programs is to recognize the impact that stress has on program completion and to understand how programs can improve the stress levels of their students in order to help them be more successful (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Rummell, 2015; Tompkins, Brecht, Tucker, Neander, & Swift, 2016). Studies have been conducted on the importance of support for moderating the impacts of stress for medical students, clinical psychology students, and nursing students (Laschinger, Borgogni, Consiglio, & Read, 2015) but no research has been completed on school psychology graduate students specifically. School psychology is unique in that it is an underrepresented field in psychology. The current study examined the relationship between the perceived stress of school psychology graduate students and the amount of support that their programs offer. This study aimed to determine whether the presence of program provided support system is correlated with perceived level of stress among school psychology graduate students. Furthermore, this study broke down types of program

support as they relate to perceived stress. Findings of this study provide direction to school psychology programs attempting to improve the supports that they provide.

*Keywords:* support, stress, school psychology

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The current mental health of young adults within the United States of America is more precarious than ever before (Auerback, Mortier, Bruffaerts, Alonso, Benjet, Cuijpers, Murray, 2018; CDC, 2013; Gallagher, Gill, Sysko, 2000; Twenge, Cooper, Joiner, Duffy, & Binau, 2019). This current status has been shown to relate to a variety of factors (e.g. economic changes, social media, work-life balance). Additionally, it has been shown that college students, compared to their non-college attending, young adult peers have significantly greater mental health concerns (Auerback et al., 2018; Blanco, Okuda, Wright, Hasin, Grant, Liu, Olfson, 2008; CDC, 2013; Eisenberg, Hunt, Speer, 2013; Gaddis, Heinze, Beck, Eisenberg, 2015;). Furthermore, graduate students present even higher levels of mental illness (Evans, Bira, Weiss, & Vanderford, 2018).

The various factors related to poorer mental health are also related to heightened levels of stress. Furthermore, stress has been shown to be a major detriment to the experience of mental health (El-Ghoroury, Galper, Sawaqdeh, & Bufka, 2012; Evans et al., 2018). One way of improving mental health is to improve levels of perceived stress (Yusufov, Nicoloro-SantaBarbara, Grey, Moyer, & Lobel, 2018).

One way of lowering stress and therefore, improving the likelihood of stronger mental health, is to provide supports for students who are struggling. It has been shown that the impact of stress among graduate student populations is moderated by the provision of quality program supports (Golde, 2005; Ives, Rowley, 2005; Leijen, Lepp, Remmik, 2016; Litalien, 2015; Lovitts, 2008; McAlpine, Amundsen, 2009; Pauley, Cunningham, Toth, 1999). These studies on program support and stress have been largely conducted with medical students, nursing students,

and clinical psychology students. Within the field of school psychology little research has been conducted regarding student levels of stress and the provision of program support.

There is a major shortage of school psychologists in the U.S. and to improve this, school psychology training programs need to graduate more students (Walcott, Hyson, & Loe, 2017). Within other fields, difficulties with mental health has been shown to be a leading cause of attrition of students from programs (Amundsen, 2009; Golde, 2005; Ives et al., 2005; Leijen et al., 2016; Litalien, 2015; Lovitts, 2008; Pauley et al., 1999; Sverdlik, Hall, McAlpine, & Hubbard, 2018). School Psychology programs need to understand more about how they can improve the stress levels and therefore, mental health of their students in order to help them be more successful (Grant-Vallone, & Ensher, 2000; Rummell, 2015; Tompkins, Brecht, Tucker, Neander, & Swift, 2016). The current study will examine the relationship between the perceived stress of school psychology graduate students and the types of support that their programs offer.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **College Students and Mental Health**

The US Department of Education (2011) reported that more than 20 million students were enrolled in postsecondary education. More young adults are attending college now than ever before. This has a lot of positive connotations to it, such as increased access to better job opportunities and higher income. Furthermore, it contributes to a more educated population. However, the increase in student college attendance has taken place alongside an increase in mental health concerns for these students. It has been shown that roughly one third of undergraduate college students present significant mental health symptomatology including depression, generalized anxiety, and suicidality (Eisenberg, 2013).

In one large scale study conducted by Blanco et al. (2008), college and non-college attending peers aged 19-25 participated in a survey of mental illness among young adults. The sample included 43,093 respondents. The study found that 11.9% of college students have a diagnosed anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders are the most highly diagnosed disorders among college students (Eisenberg, 2013). According to Bennett and Shepherd (2011), anxiety disorders are characterized by persistent, chronic, and high levels of worry. While there are several forms of anxiety disorders, ranging from generalized anxiety disorder to panic disorder, they all involve excessive worrying and can be debilitating. For students who develop symptoms of anxiety or are diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, college can become extremely difficult. Not only is it associated with poorer performance, but it is also associated with lower rates of graduation.

The second most prevalent diagnosis among the college population is depression (Eisenberg, 2013). In line with this, the Blanco et al. (2008) study found that between seven to nine percent of undergraduate college students have a diagnosed depressive disorder. Depressive disorders are characterized by persistent, severe, and chronic sadness, loss of hope, and fatigue. Like anxiety disorders, depressive disorders can be broken down into a variety of disorders ranging from major depressive disorder to dysthymia. Regardless, depressive symptoms or a formal depression diagnosis are all linked to negative college outcomes, from poorer GPAs to higher drop-out rates (Blanco et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the relationship between mental health concerns and students is even greater among graduate students. In a study conducted by Evans, Bira, Weiss, and Vanderford (2018) it was found that graduate students are more than six times as likely to experience depression and anxiety compared to the general population. The research shows a clear pattern of mental health problems increasing among college students, and again further increasing for graduate students. This begs the question, why does this relationship exist? While both undergraduate and graduate school are a financial burden for students, graduate school places students in higher debt (APA, 2015; Baum, Ma, 2012; Walsemann, Gee, & Gentile, 2015). Furthermore, the academic pressures of graduate school are significantly higher than that of undergraduate (Rummell, 2015).

This area of research is important because it outlines the severity of mental health issues among college students. Yet this area of research still leaves room for further questioning regarding the ways in which mental illness among this population can be examined more closely for moderating factors. To look at the relationship between college students and mental illness in

a more specific way, many researchers use the variable of stress (Yusufov et al., 2018). Not only is stress highly correlated with mental illness but it has a strong relationship with undergraduate college experiences (Yusufov, et al., 2018). Additionally, it has an even greater relationship with graduate level education (Yusufov, et al., 2018).

### **Stress and Mental Illness**

In order to target the relationship between mental illness and the graduate student population, the variable of stress must be examined. Stress is a common part of life that everyone experiences (Yusufov, et al., 2018). It is often perceived as fluctuating over time and across contexts. To a certain extent, stress can motivate people to complete necessary tasks or to handle challenging situations. However, above a certain level, stress can inhibit productivity and become tied to lower mental health. Stress has been shown to often be a precursor to depression and anxiety (Augner, 2015; Beiter, Nash, McCrady, Rhoades, Linscomb, Clarahan, & Sammut, 2015; Iqbal, Gupta, Venkatarao, 2015). As mentioned earlier, both depression and anxiety are the most common diagnoses among higher education populations (Eisenberg, 2013). Furthermore, significant numbers of students report higher stress in line with symptoms of mental illness (Augner, 2015; Beiter et al., 2015). For example, research conducted by Kessler (2003) found that there is a strong link between depression and stress. Kessler's results illustrated a dose-response relationship between the intensity of stress and degree of depression. As the intensity of stress was increased, the degree of depression increased as well. Due to such strong relationships found within mental health research, college student's risk for mental health problems are often examined through perceived levels of stress (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012).

## **Graduate Students and Stress**

Levels of stress increase significantly when a student enters graduate school. This puts the graduate student population at even higher risk for developing mental illness. This increase in stress takes place for several reasons. Graduate programs often require intensive hours, can be expensive, and are academically challenging (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). In one study, in which psychology graduate students were surveyed, the following reasons were rated according to how much they play into student stress: academic/coursework pressures (68.1%), finances/debt (63.9%), anxiety (60.7%), and poor work–life balance (58.7%) (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). One major factor found within this area of research is the financial difficulty associated with obtaining a graduate degree.

As seen with undergraduate students, loans impact stress (Walsemann, Gee, & Gentile, 2015). As student's financial debt rises, stress does as well. Graduate students take out even greater loans and go further into debt than undergraduates. This type of financial burden creates long-term and short-term stress. From planning out how you will pay off loans, to figuring out how you will afford groceries with such a tight student budget, stress heightens. Therefore, risk for poor mental health heightens alongside it.

Additionally, graduate school is extremely time consuming (Gastelum et al., 2018; Rummell, 2015) Studies on graduate students have considered the relationship between work-life balance and stress. Work-life balance involves the way a person's time is spent in regard to responsibilities (e.g. assignments, work, and providing for others) and self-care (e.g. eating a meal, relaxing, physical exercise). An imbalance between these things leads to higher levels of stress. Graduate students often experience a significantly low work life balance due to a higher

workload requirement (Gastelum et al., 2018). Graduate students often split time between classes, assistantship work, and research. Furthermore, in programs that require practicum hours and volunteer work, the workload increases substantially. Little time is left for self-care.

Overall, studies have found that graduate students have significantly higher levels of stress than the general population (El-Ghoroury et al., 2011). Due to the strong relationship between stress and mental health and the higher levels of stress among graduate students, it is easy to ascertain that there are higher levels of mental health issues among graduate students than undergraduate students. Research has found this relationship to be persistent (Evans, Gastelu, Weiss, & Vanderford, 2018). Evans, Gastelum, Weiss, and Vanderford (2018) collected data from a large sample of graduate students regarding their general mental health as measured using the General Anxiety Disorder 07 Scale (GAD07). These researchers found that graduate students are more than six times as likely to experience depression and anxiety compared to the general population.

With graduate students undergoing so many stressors, it is easy to see why they are so susceptible to mental illness and why it is important to help students address their stress levels. Going beyond the graduate student population as a whole, it has also been shown that higher levels of stress exist for students within medical, helping, and clinically oriented professions such as medical school, nursing programs and clinical psychology programs (Yusufov, et al., 2018). On top of the academic and financial concerns of graduate school, these programs often require practicum experiences. This means that these students are required to work with people in order to gain practice in their field. This can be highly stressful. In a study conducted with nursing students it was shown that higher levels of stress were tied to the new experiences

required and a feeling that they lack the knowledge to be working in these capacities (Seibel, 2014). Going forward, this is important because in examining the stress of graduate students and protective factors, people in medical, helping, and clinically oriented fields should be prioritized. When looking for ways to improve the stress and mental health of graduate students, keeping an eye on what might aid those in helping fields will be important.

### **Impact of Support on Stress**

While the relationship between mental illness and stress is consistently significant, not all students who experience high stress develop poor mental health. Environmental and circumstantial situations may influence the impact and perceptions of stress differently among different people (Yusufov, et al., 2018). These “other factors” contribute to stress resilience. These are the factors that high stress fields of study, such as medical, helping, and clinically oriented fields should have built into their programs. Organized supports within programs have been shown to be highly effective for improving the interaction between stress and mental health (Yusufov, et al., 2018). Organized supports are program planned and include built-in features for supporting graduate students. This broad term for support can include many types of support from social support to financial support. Examples of organized supports include advisors, peer mentors, faculty mentors. The key to organized supports is that they are built into the graduate program and offered systematically to all students.

This relationship between support and stress was illustrated by Wang et al (2015). This study was conducted with 632 graduate students. They found that those who reported high stress also indicated higher depression (Wang, Gee, Gentile, 2015). Additionally, they found that the impact of perceived stress on depression was significantly smaller when a higher level of support

was reported. In the other direction, the impact of stress on depression was significantly higher for those with lower perceived support (Wang et al., 2015). This and other findings like it are important because they show that while stress does often impact mental health, support can work to moderate the impact. Furthermore, while all graduate students may have high amounts of stressors, support may play a key role in reducing perceived stress. Graduate school programs are stressful but providing support can aid in alleviating the stress and mental illness relationship (Wang et al., 2015).

In a meta-analysis conducted by Yusufov et al., (2018), stress reduction interventions and processes provided to college and graduate students were analyzed. This study found that alongside interventions such as cognitive behavioral therapy, support interventions were able to significantly reduce stress. These interventions required a prescribed amount of social support to be given to a student. This type of intervention reflects organized support because it can be built into a graduate program for the benefit of the students. This study illustrates the relationship between support and stress in a way that shows perceived stress reduction with the introduction of support interventions (Yusufov, et al., 2018).

### **Benefits of Stress Reduction Through Program Support**

Not only has research shown the importance of support for reducing the link between stress and mental health problems but it also presents itself as a significant factor in one's current life satisfaction. In a study conducted by Tomkins, Brecht, Tucker, Neander, and Swift (2016) doctoral students from APA accredited graduate programs were surveyed regarding available supports, life satisfaction, and program satisfaction. Through regression analyses, faculty support was found to account for a significant amount of variance in both life and program satisfaction.

This study illustrates the importance of program support for building up positive outlooks towards a student's program and life. Furthermore, it does so using psychology students who have high practicum and internship requirements on top of the other difficulties associated with graduate education.

Alongside the immediate mental health and life satisfaction benefits of reduced stress through support there is also an academic benefit. In a 2018 study conducted by Sverlik, Hall, McAlpine, and Hubbard the relationship between program attrition and support is illustrated. This study examined 163 articles on graduate program attrition in order to garner a comprehensive understanding of contributing factors. Within graduate programs, the most prevalent reason for graduate program attrition was a poor supervisor relationship (Sverdlik, Hall, McAlpine, & Hubbard, 2018). Supervisory relationships are one of the important pieces of program organized supports that should be provided and better examined for quality. Furthermore, this study found that departmental support and socialization was also a major factor related to attrition among these empirical studies (Sverdlik et al., 2018).

In addition to discussing current impacts of stress and support on graduate students, it is also important to examine the long-term associations that are garnered through provided supports. In longitudinal data conducted by researchers Clark, Murdock, and Koetting (2009), data was collected from a national sample of counseling psychology graduate students. These researchers found that stress and poor organized support were linked with later career burnout. Burnout is a form of career exhaustion associated with low motivation to continue. In extreme cases of burnout it shares features with clinical depression (Leiter, 2017). This finding is highly

important among medical, helping, and clinically oriented fields which typically have higher burnout rates (Leiter, 2017).

All of these findings suggest the relevance of overall organized program support when improving the stress of graduate students. However, research has also shown the importance of examining support by the type of support offered. Not only should programs provide organized support but they should be aware of the types of support they can provide and how it may benefit graduate students.

### **Types of Program Support**

In research on graduate program support, classifications for types of support arise and while some, such as social support have been thoroughly examined and shown to be related to stress resilience, many have not been reviewed in research. Other classifications of types of support include financial support, academic and career support, and emotional and mental health support (Clark et al., 2009; El Ghoroury et al., 2012; Goplerud, 1980; Leijen et al., 2016; Maulik et al., 2011; Peng et al., 2013; Tompkins et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2014; Yusufov et al., 2018). It is also important that the different classifications of support be examined separately in addition to looking at support as a whole.

#### **Social Support**

A highly researched classification for graduate program support is social support. Social support is the presence of people available to help you in a way that you can “feel, notice, or accept” (Wang, Cai, Qian, & Peng, 2014). It can take various shapes from family members and friends to colleagues and mentors. This variability within social support makes it valuable for graduate student populations in that it is something graduate programs can work to implement or

encourage (Goplerud, 1980; Tompkins, Brecht, Tucker, Neander, & Swift, 2016). Furthermore, as with graduate program support research in general, social support has been shown to moderate the impact of stress on depression within undergraduate students experiencing high stress. In an earlier mentioned study conducted by Wang et al. (2014), a population of undergraduates experiencing high stress were surveyed regarding the level of social support they received, their stress level, and symptoms of depression. Students with high stress and high social support showed significantly less symptoms of depression in comparison to low social support students with high stress (Wang et al., 2014).

Social support has been shown to protect people from stress and in turn, depression and anxiety (Maulik, Eaton, Bradshaw, 2011; Peng, Miao, Xiao, 2013; Thoits, 2011). This finding exemplifies what research into perceived support illustrates; people who are socially supported are more resilient in the face of high stress situations, including graduate school (Maulik, Eaton, Bradshaw, 2011; Peng, Miao, Xiao, 2013; Thoits, 2011). In a 1980 study by Goplerud, first year graduate students kept track of all social interactions with faculty and peers and then reported on stress and predictors of physical and psychological disturbances. This study's results showed a relationship between frequency of social interaction with faculty and peers and lower disturbances (Goplerud, 1980).

Social support within graduate school has been classified further in a study conducted by Tompkins, Brecht, Tucker, Neander, and Swift (2016). These researchers were interested in finding out whether different sources of social support had greater impacts on psychology graduate student life satisfaction. In this study, the researchers divided social support up among

possible sources in graduate school and while all sources did account for variance, the largest source of variance was that of faculty social support.

### **Academic and Career Support**

Academic and career support has also arisen within support research but has been less of a classification and instead is often lumped into research examining the quality of advising and mentorship as it relates to student outcomes. Academic/career support is the provision of mentors or supervisors who are readily available to answer questions and guide students through graduate education and subsequent career paths. While this centers around advisor type relationships, this type of support can take many different forms as long as the appropriate guidance is provided. This area stands out as an important classification because one major cause for stress among graduate students is academic pressure and among many fields career pressure and anxieties (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). Therefore, providing a support that works to lesson this stress may be getting at one of the roots of this complicated issue.

These academic and career supports largely take the shape of supervisors, advisors, or mentors. While advisor support can also contribute to other forms of support, a key role of the advisor/supervisor/mentor within a graduate program is to work as a guide through academia and career fields. In a study conducted by Clark et al. (2009), psychology doctoral students were surveyed nationally in order to examine the relationship between poor advisor support, stress, and later career burnout and dissatisfaction. These researchers found that poor advisor support was found to be a later predictor of career burnout and high stress. This study does not stand alone, poor supervisor and mentor support has been linked with poor academic and emotional outcomes in many studies, outlining the importance of this classification (Chiang; 2003;

Cotterall, 2011; Golde, 2005; Ives, Rowley, 2005; Leijen, Lepp, & Remmik, 2016; Litalien, Guay, 2015; Lovitts, 2008; McAlpine, Amundsen, 2009; Pauley, Cunningham, & Toth, 1999). High levels of stress and stress inducing situations can be lessened with the guidance of a professional within the field of study who can pass on knowledge, reducing the burden of uncertainty and feelings of low self-efficacy (Chiang, 2003; Cotterall, 2011; McAlpine et al., 2009; Rummell, 2015).

### **Financial Support**

Another type of support is financial support. According to 2015 data from the American Psychological Association, the average tuition for doctorate students in psychology increased from \$18,917 to \$21,317 within two years. This is a 12.7% increase. Furthermore, the average psychology master's tuition increased by 10.5%, climbing from \$14,373 to \$15,888 in the same time span (APA, 2015). It can be assumed that current costs have risen even more. Not only is graduate education within psychology becoming more expensive but debt is rising with it (APA 2015; Doran, Kraha, Ameen, & El-Ghoroury, 2016). For example, the average amount of debt obtained by school psychology graduate students in 2015 was \$72,181.8 (Doran et al., 2016).

The data surrounding the cost of higher education is key to providing graduate student support because one of the top stressors identified by this population is finances and debt (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). Additionally, this coincides with other research showing a positive relationship between student debt and higher stress (Walsemann, Gee, & Gentile, 2015). In a study conducted by Hyun, Quinn, Madon, and Lustig (2007), the stress levels and mental health needs of international graduate students were examined for relationships with available supports. In looking at financial support, it was found that students with higher financial confidence had

lower stress (Hyun et al., 2007). This research and a growing financial burden points to a need for financial support within graduate programs. Financial support can mean educating students about finances as well as working to make financial supports available. Regardless, the goal is to reduce the stress and worry about surviving within a difficult economic situation (i.e. financial confidence).

### **Emotional and Mental Health Support**

Emotional and mental health support among graduate programs should also be better investigated for positive impacts on stress because as was examined earlier, mental health difficulties are a prevalent issue among graduate student populations. Emotional and mental health support can again take many shapes within a graduate program. It could be the availability of emotional outlets and mental health education. For example, programs can educate their students about what mental health resources are available to them in the area or where they can gain access to instruction in positive coping mechanisms such as stress management through mindfulness. In an earlier mentioned meta-analysis, examining the impacts of different types of interventions on graduate student stress and anxiety, psychoeducational interventions and interventions in which students were taught coping and relaxation techniques (e.g. mindfulness) were significantly related to a reduction of both short and long-term stress and anxiety as compared to control groups (Yusufov et al., 2018).

Emotional and mental health support can also include the availability of peer and faculty mentors as a resource for showing emotional support by listening to the frustrations and worries of graduate students in a non-judgmental capacity. As mentioned earlier the relationship between an advisor and advisee can be crucial to academic success and emotional outcomes. This role of

the advisor can go beyond academic and career support into providing emotional support. It was proposed in a literature review conducted by Pearson (2012) that students should be provided with counseling trained mentors within their programs (Pearson, 2012). Expanding the role of mentor to include emotional support can have many positive impacts such as lower stress among graduate students (Pearson, 2012). However, while having a counseling trained mentor may be ideal, research has shown that advisors can work to provide emotional support in other ways, such as providing clear access to mental health resources. This would mean making clear paths for students to seek out emotional and mental health support from counseling centers and other clinics. The importance of making these resources clear and encouraging students to keep mental health as a priority in graduate school has not been researched as often.

Understanding how support and its many forms interact with stress and mental health can be beneficial to improving graduate student outcomes. However, little has been done to investigate support and stress among school psychology programs. School psychology is another helping profession where programs have high academic requirements and financial concerns in addition to requiring practicum and internship experiences (Ameen, & El-Ghoroury, 2016; Doran, Kraha, Marks, Ameen, & El-Ghoroury, 2016; NASP, 2010; Walcott et al., 2017).

### **School Psychology Graduate Programs**

In addition to the typical high stress experienced by all graduate students, school psychology graduate students may also experience stress when considering the field they are going into. There are many jobs available but school psychologists are currently stretched very thin due to a shortage in school psychologists nationally (Walcott et al., 2017). According to NASP standards, the appropriate ratio is one school psychologist to five hundred to seven

hundred students. Yet, nationally school psychologists are not meeting this standard and are instead seeing to the needs of children in the thousands (Walcott et al., 2017).

To improve this shortage, school psychology programs need to graduate more students. As mentioned before, attrition among other fields has been linked to high stress and low support. School psychology programs need to understand more about how they can improve the stress levels of their students in order to help them be more successful as graduate students and reduce the likelihood of later burnout (Grant-Vallone, & Ensher, 2000; Rummell, 2015; Tompkins, Brecht, Tucker, Neander, & Swift, 2016). The following study will work to examine perceived stress and organized supports among school psychology graduate programs.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Chronic stress is significantly correlated with poor mental health and the presence of mental illness. Research into the stress levels of graduate students shows that graduate students are highly prone to persistent stress, making this population a priority for stress reduction. Research within helping and clinical fields has shown the benefits of providing program level supports to graduate students. Support is correlated with resilience to stress. Furthermore, several different types of program level supports including social, academic/career, financial, and emotional/mental health have shown promising results with graduate students. This study aims to expand on the relationship between program level support and perceived stress among graduate students by evaluating whether the association exists for school psychology graduate students.

A national survey of school psychology Masters and Doctorate students was conducted. Student experiences regarding program support were one portion of a two-part survey conducted to examine factors related to the reduction of stress in graduate students. Another researcher

examined the self-care practices of school psychology graduate students. The research questions for this study were as follows

1. Is there a correlation between reported level of stress experienced in graduate school and overall program support?
2. Is there a correlation between current perceived stress and overall program support?
3. Is there a significant difference in stress level by type of program, year of program, or cohort size?
4. Is there a significant difference in current perceived stress by type of program, year of program, or cohort size?
5. What do students report as hindering them from using available supports?
6. What types of supports do students feel are available outside of the examined categories?
7. What supports do students feel would be helpful in reducing their stress?

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Participants

This survey of school psychology students who attend masters/specialist and doctoral level training programs nationally had 292 participants consent and respond to questions. Participants were cut from inclusion in data analysis if they responded to less than 100% of survey items. The final sample size was 201. The 91 participants who did not complete the survey may have stopped due to fatigue as they largely were unresponsive to the second half of the survey which included either a self-care measure or the support measure.

The ages of participants ranged from 21 to 57 with the average age being 27.47 ( $SD=6.54$ ). Within the sample, 85.6% of participants identified as female, 13.4% identified as male, and .5% identified as other. These percentages line up with national averages of school psychologists provided by a 2015 NASP census (Walcott et al., 2017). The NASP census found that 83% of school psychologists were female and 16% were male (Walcott et al., 2017). Additionally, the reported ethnicities were as follows: 74.3% Caucasian, 8.4% African American, 11.9% Hispanic/Latinx, 1.0% Asian, .5% Native American, and 3.0% other. These numbers actually display slightly higher diversity than those collected on the NASP 2015 census (Walcott et al., 2017). The numbers collected in 2015 indicated that 87% of school psychologists were White, 5% were African American, 6% were Hispanic/Latinx, and 2.8% were Asian (Walcott et al., 2017). It was found that 67.3% of participants were from a masters or specialist program while 31.7% were within a doctoral program. Each participant also reported the size of their cohort. Of the 201 participants, 41 had a cohort of between 0-5 people, 115 had a cohort of between 6-12 people, and 45 had a cohort of 13 or more people.

## **Measures**

The data for this research project were collected through a survey developed by the two researchers involved in the study. The survey consisted of four sections including questions regarding stress, questions regarding program support, questions regarding self-care practices, and questions regarding demographics (see Appendix A). Information about the survey and consent for participation in the survey were provided at the beginning. All of the surveys sent out for completion began with the questions regarding stress. For half of the surveys the stress questions were followed with questions about program support first and questions about self-care second and this was reversed for the other half. This was done in order to rule out the impact of fatigue on either measure which on average takes 5 minutes to complete. All surveys ended with demographic questions. The survey was developed with Qualtrics software, Version June 2019 of Qualtrics. Copyright © 2019 Qualtrics.

### **Stress**

The first section on stress consisted of several different stress measures. These measures were selected so that data could be obtained regarding experiences of stress within the last month as well as data on a student's level of stress as it has been perceived across graduate school as a whole. In addition, data regarding perceived impact of stress was obtained.

The first set of stress questions asked students to estimate the percentage of time that they have experienced different levels of stress during their time as school psychology graduate students. For this Level of Stress measure, stress was categorized and defined for participants according to intensity ranging from typical to extreme, creating a range of stress perceptions. As described by Yusuf, et al., stress can be defined by the impact it has on one's ability to handle

work and life (2018). Therefore, the intensities of stress were defined by how much of an impact they may be having on graduate work as well as personal experience. The first classification, Typical Stress, is defined as experiencing some stress but it not impacting graduate work or the student's personal experience. Next, Moderate Stress is defined as stress that has some negative impact on personal life and/or graduate school-work. Third, Significant Stress is defined as stress that has a large negative impact on personal life and/or graduate school-work. Last, Extreme Stress is defined as stress that is debilitating to both personal life and/or graduate school-work. Participants were asked to indicate how much time they have spent in graduate school at each level of stress, out of 100%. For example, a student may indicate Moderate Stress for 20% of the time they have been in graduate school but Typical Stress for the remaining time (80%). Each of the four levels of stress as indicated above were multiplied by the percentage of time reported to be spent experiencing that level of stress (out of 100%). The total Level of Stress ranged from 100-400, with higher numbers indicating a greater perceived Level of Stress since entering the program.

The second set of questions required students to rate items related to the experience of stress that they had experienced within the past month. These questions were taken directly from the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-14) (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). Permission for use of the scale is not required when using it for academic research or educational purposes (Cohen et al., 1983). The PSS-14 is one of the most widely used measures for evaluating stress (Lee, 2012). Furthermore, it has been largely validated (Lee, 2012). In a study that looked at the psychometric properties of measures used within research utilizing the PSS-14, a Cronbachs Alpha of greater than 70 was reported in all 11 studies examined. These findings point towards

the overall reliability of the PSS-14 (Lee, 2012). The PSS-14 survey contains 14 items on a 0 to 4 Likert scale ranging from Never to Very Often. Each item assessed feelings and thoughts within the last month. Within PSS-14 a Total Perceived Stress Score was obtained by reversing the scores on the seven positive items and then summing across all 14 items. Total stress scores within the PSS-14 range from 0-56 with higher scores indicating greater perceived stress

In addition to these stress measures, five multiple choice questions and one open ended question was provided in the survey to assess the impact of stress on the graduate student's personal life and school experiences.

### **Program Support and Self-Care**

The second and third sections of this survey consisted of questions on self-care developed by another researcher and questions on program support relevant to this research study. The program support section included 12 items examining social, academic/career, financial, and emotional/mental health support. Each type of support contributed three items to the overall measure. Therefore, of the overall 12 items, 3 asked about social support, 3 asked about financial support, 3 asked about academic/career support, and 3 asked about emotional/mental health support. Items were largely adapted from a 2017 National Association of School Psychologists article in which a call for program support is outlined (NASP, 2017). Additional items were drawn from the types of support identified in the literature (Goplerud, 1980; Clark et al., 2009; Maulik et al., 2011; El Ghoroury et al., 2012; Peng et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2014; Leijen et al., 2016; Tompkins et al., 2016; Yusufov et al., 2018). Each item indicated a type of support and then asked (1) was this made available to you (2) how often did you utilize it if it was available. Therefore, if a student indicated that it was available, they would obtain a score of 1 summed

with the amount that they indicated utilizing it (0-4), creating a total possible score of 5 per item. If a student indicated that it was not available (i.e. score of 0), they would move on to the next item as they could not have utilized it. The use of both an availability and utilization measure per item creates a more valuable measure for examining the function that support serves. If utilization was not taken into account, a high support score would not indicate the amount of support received, as the student does not necessarily use it. Furthermore, the likert (0-4) used within the utilization measure provides data about the frequency of utilization and therefore should indicate a spectrum of support received providing richer data about the function of support. The 12 items provided a Total Support Score which ranged from 0-60 and a total possible score of 0-15 was available for each total type of support (e.g. total financial support). Lastly, three qualitative questions were included in order to garner further information about program support characteristics and utilization. These questions survey the student's thoughts about why they may not utilize an available support, what ways programs may be supporting students that were not included in the survey, and ways that they feel programs should be supporting students but are not.

### **Demographic Questions**

Lastly, a short demographics questionnaire was included in this survey. The questions asked include year in the program, type of program (e.g. specialist, doctoral), cohort size, gender, race, and age.

### **Procedure**

Following approval by the research committee, an application to the Western Carolina University IRB was completed and approved. Then a database listing all school psychology

graduate programs, their program director's names, and emails was used to send out the survey. This database was developed through information available at the NASP website. These program directors were contacted and randomly sent one of the two graduate student survey anonymous links with the difference being the order in which questions were asked regarding program support versus self-care. The program director was also provided with information about the study and how consent would be obtained and they were asked to distribute the school psychology graduate student survey link among their students.

Individual participants who entered the survey were initially presented with information about the study and informed consent. If consent was not indicated, access to the survey was not given. The survey remained available for 1 month before closing. The data was collected in Qualtrics and transferred to Excel for cleanup, followed by SPSS for analyses. Qualitative Thematic Analysis was used to analyze the individual responses of participants to the four open-ended questions (one open-ended question regarding stress and three in relation to support). Thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) is a method of analyzing qualitative research employing a six-step process. In regard to this process, first participants' responses were individually examined, coding was performed, and emerging themes were identified. After all responses were categorized, the researcher individually identified themes in terms of content. The last step involved identifying main and sub-themes present throughout participants' perceptions.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics

The Level of Stress measure had a mean score of 204 ( $SD = 63.64$ ). Large variability within the measure indicated that it was not a valid measure of stress and further analyses did not utilize this measure for that reason.

Mean scores were also found for the perceived level of stress measure (PSS-14). The perceived level of stress of our participants had a mean of 32.77 ( $SD=5.44$ ). According to the authors of the PSS-14, anything measuring above 27 is considered to be a high level of stress (Lee 2012).

The total level of support was also obtained for each participant and found to have a mean of 23.38 ( $SD=10$ ). Furthermore, total support categories were obtained. It was found that there was a mean total social support of 7.94 ( $SD=3.83$ ), a total financial support of 6.55 ( $SD=4.00$ ), a total academic/career support of 4.98 ( $SD=3.51$ ), and a total emotional/mental health support of 3.91 ( $SD=3.03$ ).

Descriptive statistics were also utilized in order to examine the average perceived impact of graduate program stress on both the personal and academic experiences of the sample (1-A great deal, 2-A lot, 3-A moderate amount, 4-A little, 5-None at all). In relation to academic performance within one's program, a mean score of 3.42 ( $SD=.97$ ) was found. In relation to impact on personal life, a mean score of 2.47 ( $SD=1.07$ ) was found.

Additionally, descriptive statistics were obtained to determine the average amount of thought given to dropping out of one's program due to stress (1-I have never considered it, 2-I

have thought about it once or twice, 3-I have seriously considered it). Within this sample, a mean of 1.71 ( $SD=.67$ ) was obtained.

Descriptive statistics were also obtained in order to examine the average comparison students make for their own stress to that of their program-based peers (1-Less stress, 2-About the same, 3-More stress). The sample obtained a mean of 2.05 ( $SD=.63$ ).

Lastly, descriptive statistics were obtained to determine the average comparison students make for their current level of stress to their level of stress when they were undergraduates (1-Much less stress, 2-Less stress, 3-About the same stress, 4-More stress, 5-Much more stress). A mean of 3.42 ( $SD=1.52$ ) was found.

### **Inferential Statistics**

Pearson correlations were conducted in order to determine whether a significant relationship between Total Perceived Stress and Total Program Support was present. Furthermore, they were used to examine whether a significant relationship existed between Total Perceived Stress and the categories of support (Total Social Support, Total Financial Support, Total Academic/Career Support, and Total Emotional/Mental Health Support).

#### **PSS-14 and Total Support**

Using a Pearson Correlation, the relationship between Total Perceived Stress and Total Support was examined. The Total Perceived Stress and Total Support obtained were not significantly correlated,  $r = -.09$ ,  $p = .224$ . In other words, the amount of Total Perceived Stress that school psychology graduate students experience does not correlate to the Total Support provided within the program.

#### **PSS-14 and Social Support**

Using a Pearson Correlation, the relationship between Total Perceived Stress and Total Social Support was examined. The Total Perceived Stress and Total Social Support obtained were not significantly correlated,  $r = -.09$ ,  $p = .233$ . In other words, the amount of perceived stress that school psychology graduate students experience does not correlate to the Total Social Support provided within the program.

#### **PSS-14 and Financial Support**

Using a Pearson Correlation, the relationship between Total Perceived Stress and Total Financial Support was examined. The Total Perceived Stress and Total Financial Support obtained were not significantly correlated,  $r = .02$ ,  $p = .770$ . In other words, the amount of perceived stress that school psychology graduate students experience does not correlate to the Total Financial Support provided within the program.

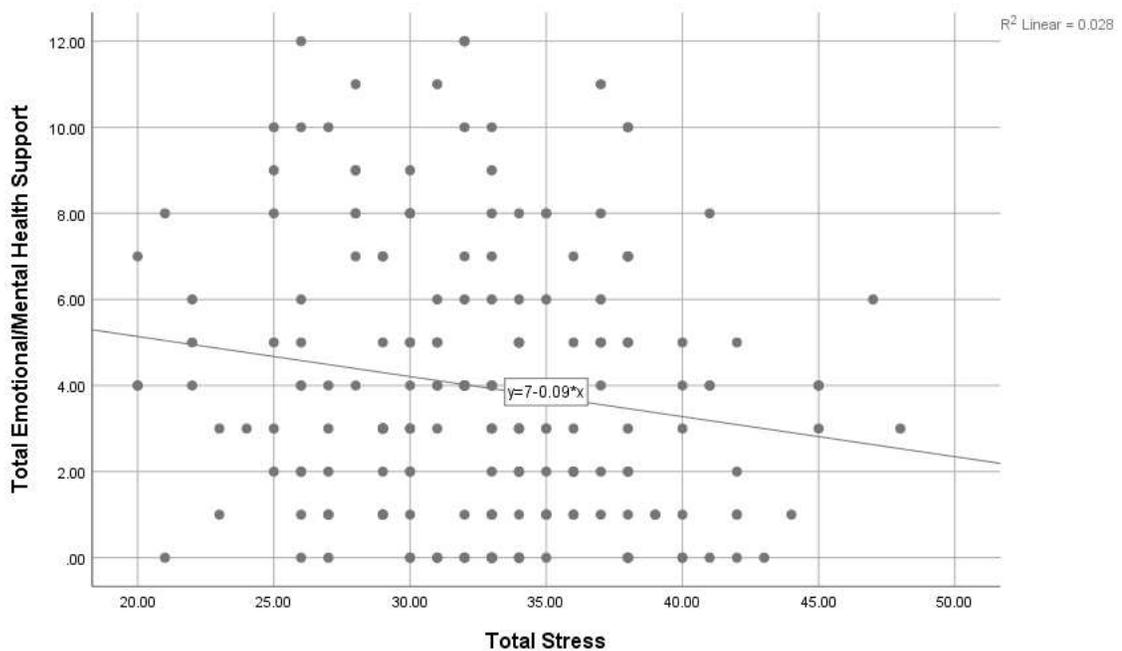
#### **PSS-14 and Academic/Career Support**

Using a Pearson Correlation, the relationship between Total Perceived Stress and Total Academic/Career Support was examined. The Total Perceived Stress and Total Academic/Career Support obtained were not significantly correlated,  $r = -.06$ ,  $p = .419$ . In other words, the amount of perceived stress that school psychology graduate students experience does not correlate to the Total Academic/Career Support provided within the program.

#### **PSS-14 and Emotional/Mental Health Support**

Using a Pearson Correlation, the relationship between Total Perceived Stress and Total Emotional/Mental Health Support was examined. The Total Perceived Stress and Total Emotional/Mental Health Support obtained were significantly correlated,  $r = -.12$ ,  $p = .019$ . In other words, the amount of perceived stress that school psychology graduate students experience

correlates to the Total Emotional/Mental Health Support provided within the program. A simple linear regression was calculated to predict Total Emotional/Mental Health Support based on Total Perceived Stress. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(1,196) = 5.64, P = .019$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .028. In other words, Total Emotional/Mental Health Support predicts Total Perceived Stress. See Figure 1 for Emotional/Mental Health Support as it correlates with Total Stress.



*Figure 1. Emotional/Mental Health Support Correlated to Total Stress.*

### **Program Types and PSS-14**

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the different types of programs on Total Perceived Stress. The independent variable for the ANOVA was type of program, with two levels (Masters/Specialist or Doctoral). The difference between the Program Types was not significant  $F(1,195) = .004, p = .95$ . The mean score for Masters/Specialist students was 32.78

( $SD = 5.43$ ). The mean score for Doctoral students was 32.73 ( $SD = 5.56$ ). See Table 1 for Total Perceived Stress means and standard deviations by Type of Program.

Table 1. *Means and Standard Deviations for Total Perceived Stress by Type of Program*

ANOVA		
Type	Mean (SD)	N
1	32.78 (5.43)	134
2	32.73 (5.56)	63

#### Year of Program and PSS-14

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the Year of Program on Total Perceived Stress (See figure 2Se). The difference between the student's Year of Program was not significant  $F(5,192) = 1.03, p = .40$ . The number of students enrolled in the programs for more than three years was considerably lower than participants enrolled in years 1 through 3. See Table 2 for Total Perceived Stress means and standard deviations by Year of Program.

Table 2. *Means and Standard Deviations for Total Perceived Stress by Year of Program*

ANOVA		
Year	Mean (SD)	N
1	32.18 (5.25)	51
2	34.00 (5.10)	73
3	33.07 (5.31)	46

4	31.65 (7.54)	17
5	29.33 (3.05)	3
6	35.63 (5.80)	8

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### **Cohort Size and PSS-14**

A Pearson Correlation was also used to determine whether a relationship between Total Perceived Stress and Cohort Size exists. The Total Perceived Stress and Cohort Size were not significantly correlated,  $r = -.06, p = .39$ . In other words, the amount of perceived stress that school psychology graduate students in this sample experience does not correlate with the Cohort Size.

### **Exploratory Questions**

In addition to looking for potential relationships between Total Stress and Type of Program, Year of Program, and Cohort Size, a relationship between these variables and Total Support was also conducted.

### **Program Type and Total Support**

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the Program Types on overall Support received. The difference between the Program Types was significant  $F(1,198) = 5.34, p = .02$ . Results indicated that Masters/Specialist students ( $N=136, M = 22.17, SD = 10.5$ ) reported lower perceptions of total support than Doctoral students ( $N=64, M = 25.97$ ). See Table 3. The size of the effect of program time on overall support was small,  $\eta^2 = .03$ .

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Total Support by Program Type

ANOVA		
Type	Mean (SD)	N
Masters/Specialist	22.17 (10.5)	136
Doctorate	25.97 (11.49)	64

### Year of Program and Total Support

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the Year of Program on Total Support received. The difference between the student's Year of Program was significant  $F(5,195) = 2.89$ ,  $p = .02$  (See Figure 4). The size of the effect of Year of Program on Support was medium,  $\eta^2 = .07$ . See Table 4 for Total Support means and standard deviations by Program Year.

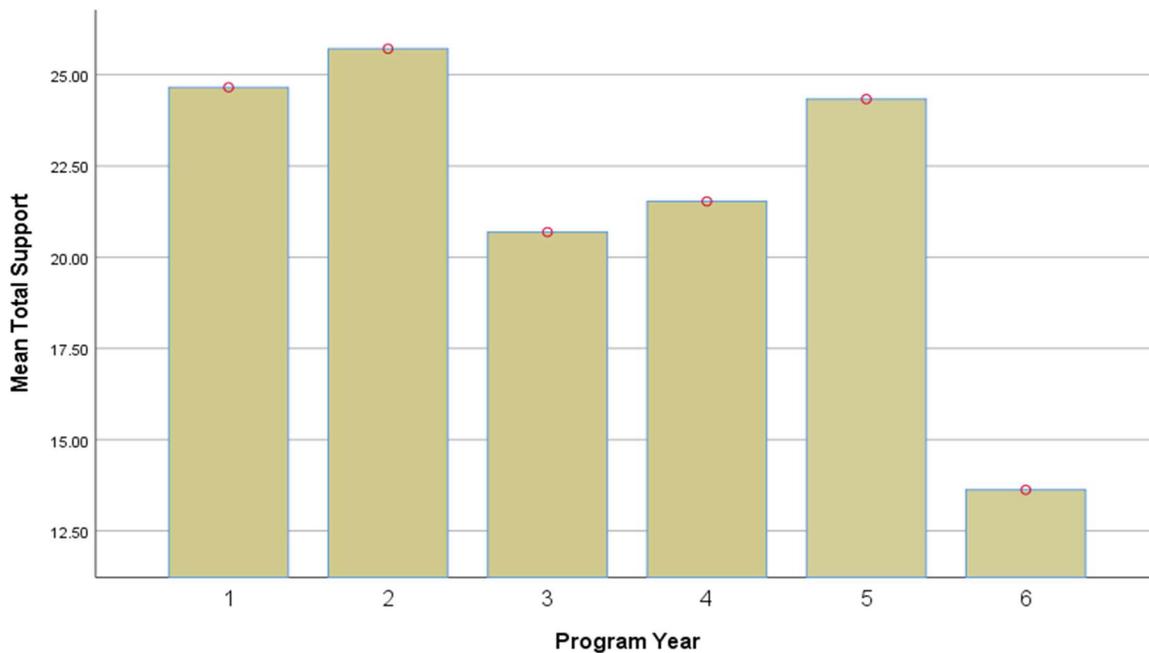
Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations for Total Support by Program Year

ANOVA		
Cohort Size	N	Mean (SD)
Year 1	52	24.65 (11.63)
Year 2	73	25.71* (11.13)
Year 3	48	20.69 (8.05)
Year 4	17	21.53 (11.91)
Year 5	3	24.33 (17.16)
Year 6	8	13.63* (8.68)

\*significant difference at the .05 level was found

A Tukey's HSD post-hoc test was conducted to examine which Program Year groups differ from Total Support. The post hoc test showed that the mean scores of Total Support were significantly different between groups of graduate students in Year 2 and Year 6 of their respective programs ( $p = .032$ ) but not between any other Program Year groups. Though this could be a function of the significant difference in the number of participants in year 6 (there were only 8).

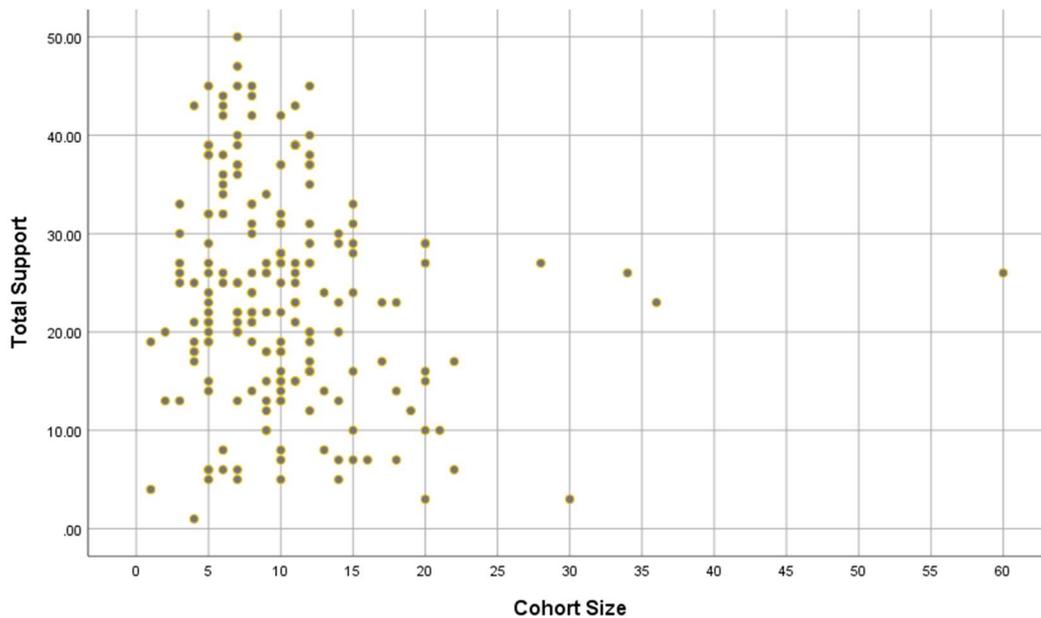
Mean scores of Total Support were not significantly different between the following groups of graduate student Program Year groups: Year 1 and Year 2 ( $p = .994$ ), Year 1 and Year 3 ( $p = .433$ ), Year 1 and Year 4 ( $p = .901$ ), Year 1 and Year 5 ( $p = 1.000$ ), Year 1 and Year 6 ( $p = .076$ ), Year 2 and Year 3 ( $p = .120$ ), Year 2 and Year 4 ( $p = .694$ ), Year 2 and Year 5 ( $p = 1.000$ ), Year 3 and Year 4 ( $p = 1.000$ ), Year 3 and Year 5 ( $p = .993$ ), Year 3 and Year 6 ( $p = .513$ ), Year 4 and Year 5 ( $p = .998$ ), Year 4 and Year 6 ( $p = .517$ ), or Year 5 and Year 6 ( $p = .677$ ). See Figure 2 for Total Support means by Program Year.



*Figure 2.* Total Support Means by Program Year.

### **Cohort Size and Total Support**

A Pearson Correlation was also used to determine whether a relationship between Total Support and Cohort Size exists. Total Support and Cohort Size were significantly correlated,  $r = -.14$ ,  $p = .05$ . In other words, the amount of overall support that school psychology graduate students experience correlates negatively with the size of their cohort. This indicates that as Cohort sizes increase, the amount of support available also decreases. A simple linear regression was calculated to predict Total Support based on Cohort Size. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(1,194) = 3.89$ ,  $p = .050$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .020. See Figure 3.



*Figure 3. Linear Regression Predicting Total Support based on Cohort Size.*

A visual examination of the data suggested that a quadratic equation might better examine the relationship. The linear model described above was determined to be the best fit. Examination of the Standard Error of Measurement indicated that optimal cohort size was between 6 and 12. In other words, students within a cohort of 6-12 members receive the highest amount of overall support.

#### **Four Types of Support**

Further analyses were also conducted with the 4 types of support that were used to develop the Total Support measure: Social Support, Financial Support, Academic/Career Support, and Emotional/Mental Health Support.

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted in order to examine whether significant differences existed between the Support Type Totals by Cohort Sizes. There

was a statistically significant difference in support obtained between categories of support based on cohort size,  $F(8, 390) = 4.92, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$ .

Next, Univariate ANOVAs were conducted in order to determine how the dependent variables differ on the independent variable. It was shown that Cohort Size has a significant effect on Total Social Support ( $F(2,198) = 7.63; p < .001; \text{partial } \eta^2 = .072$ ), Total Financial Support ( $F(2,198) = 17.46; p < .001; \text{partial } \eta^2 = .150$ ), and Total Academic/Career Support ( $F(2,198) = 4.21; p = .016; \text{partial } \eta^2 = .041$ ), and Total Emotional/Mental Health Support ( $F(2,198) = .56; p = .580; \text{partial } \eta^2 = .005$ ).

A Tukey's HSD post-hoc test was conducted to examine which groups differ on which types of support. The post hoc test showed that mean scores of Social Support were significantly different between cohort size groups of 6-12 members and those of 13 and up ( $p < .0005$ ) but not between cohorts of 0-5 and 6-12 members ( $p = .066$ ), or between cohorts of 0-5 and 13 and up ( $p = .508$ ). See Table 5 for Social Support means and standard deviations by Cohort Size.

Table 5. *Mean scores of Social Support by Cohort Size groupings*

<b>Tukey's HSD</b>		
<b>Cohort Size</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>
0-5 Members	41	7.27* (3.60)
6-12 Members	115	8.78* (3.71)
13+ Members	45	6.38** (3.82)

\*significant difference at the .05 level was found

The post hoc test showed that mean scores of Financial Support were significantly different between cohort size groups of 0-5 and 13 and up ( $p < .001$ ) as well as between cohort size groups of 6-12 and 13 and up ( $p < .001$ ). Mean scores of Financial Support were not significantly different between cohort size groups of 0-5 members and 6-12 members ( $p = .697$ ). See Table 6 for Financial Support means and standard deviations by Cohort Size.

Table 6. *Mean scores of Financial Support by Cohort Size groupings*

<b>Tukey's HSD</b>		
<b>Cohort Size</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>
0-5 Members	41	6.98* (3.51)
6-12 Members	115	7.52* (4.05)
13+ Members	45	3.71** (2.82)

\*significant difference at the .05 level was found

The post hoc test showed that mean scores of Academic/Career Support were significantly different between cohort size groups of 6-12 members and 13 and up ( $p = .016$ ) but not between cohorts of 0-5 members and 6-12 ( $p = .272$ ), or between cohorts of 0-5 and 13 and up ( $p = .601$ ). See Table 7 for Academic/Career Support means and standard deviations by Cohort Size.

Table 7. *Mean Scores of Academic/Career Support by Cohort Size groupings*

<b>Tukey's HSD</b>		
<b>Cohort Size</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>

0-5 Members	41	4.58 (3.51)
6-12 Members	115	5.56* (3.60)
13+ Members	45	3.87* (2.99)

\*significant difference at the .05 level was found

The post hoc test showed that mean scores of Emotional/Mental Health Support were not significantly different between the cohort groups of 0-5 members and 6-12 members ( $p = .951$ ), 0-5 members and 13 and up ( $p = .822$ ), or 6-12 members and 13 and up ( $p = .550$ ). See Table 8 for Emotional/Mental Health Support means and standard deviations by Cohort Size.

Table 8. *Mean scores of Emotional/Mental Health Support by Cohort Size groupings*

<b>Tukey's HSD</b>		
<b>Cohort Size</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>
0-5 Members	41	3.90 (3.02)
6-12 Members	115	4.07 (3.09)
13+ Members	45	3.51 (2.94)

\*significant difference at the .05 level was found

### **Qualitative Analyses**

Qualitative Analysis were conducted using a thematic analysis process. First, participants' responses were individually examined, and emerging themes were identified. After all responses were categorized, the researcher discussed individually identified themes in terms of content and agreement. The last step involved identifying main and sub-themes present throughout participants' perceptions of what training programs can do to address burnout.

#### **Qualitative Analysis #1: Sources of Stress**

The first qualitative question within the measure was, “What has been your largest source of stress within graduate school.” Of these responses, many participants included multiple components in their answers. Thematic analysis of the 174 total participant’s responses to what the biggest source of stress within graduate school is indicated a total of 5 main themes and 10 sub-themes (Table 9). See Appendix B.1 for a full list of provided responses. The five main themes included: (1) Research, (2) Work-Life Balance, (3) Finances, (4) Program Expectations, and (5) Personal Reasons. Several participants responded with more than one significant stressor they were experiencing in graduate school that fell into two or more themes, but the stressor went with the more dominating answer to fit into one theme.

Table 9. Identified Themes in Source of Stress Item

Main Themes	Sub-Themes
Research	
Work Life Balance	With friends, partners, kids, and families With other jobs
Finances	
Program Expectations	Overall Expectations Workload Assessments Time Limitations Practicum/Internship Experience
Personal Reasons	Unexpected Stressors Mental Health/Emotional Challenges Environment of Program

**Theme: research.** “Research productivity being added on top of clinical and teaching responsibilities.” –Participant 120

This main theme was contributed to by 11 participants. These participants indicated that their largest source of support within graduate school involved the area of research from research

projects, thesis, and dissertations. Some participants indicated specific pieces of this research that created stress (e.g. data collection) but others just indicated the broad requirement (e.g. thesis).

**Theme: work-life balance.** “Trying to balance my time between homework, my baby, taking care of our house, and my relationship with my husband. Trying to prioritize what's most important.” – Participant 162

This main theme was contributed to by 24 participants and 2 sub-themes. This main theme included discussions of trying to find balance between work and life whether that life be friends and family or other goals and interests.

***Subtheme one: with friends, partners, kids, and families.*** “Balancing schoolwork with responsibilities as a parent and a spouse.” –Participant 91

This sub-theme was contributed to by 14 participants who all indicated that their biggest area of stress within graduate school involves the difficult balancing act between personal life and the graduate program. Participants discussed how stressful it was to attempt to balance personal life factors such as families, children, and friends with their school psychology graduate program responsibilities.

***Subtheme two: with other jobs.*** “Trying to work 20 hours a week while going to graduate school full time and living 35 minutes from campus.” –Participant 173

This sub-them included 11 participants who all indicated that they struggled with a work life balance regarding their outside work responsibilities. Participants indicated that they experience the most stress from trying to balance things with multiple, part-time, and fulltime jobs. One participant even indicated that they are a special education teacher in addition to being

a school psychology graduate student. These participants discussed high work loads within programs, additional jobs, and family life.

**Theme: finances.** “Personal finances and amount of debt that is accrued/accruing” – Participant 114

A total of 14 participants contributed to this theme. These participants discussed how financial matters created their largest stressor within graduate school. They mentioned the overall cost of attending their programs, cost of living, and accumulating debt. Responses ranged from general answers (e.g Money) to specific answers (e.g. not having enough money).

**Theme: program expectations.** Lack of communication with the program expectations.” –Participant 39

This theme was contributed to by 99 participants, making it the largest source of reported stress by the sampled graduate students. This theme contained discussions of academic unrealistic expectations within programs as well as unclear expectations.

***Subtheme one: overall expectations.*** “Overwhelming amount of assignments and the time it takes to complete each assignment to meet expectations. Also, unclear expectations make things more stressful.” –Participant 152

A total of 16 participants contributed to this sub-theme, offering up examples and discussions of course work expectations as well as career and professional expectations. Furthermore, participants discussed the stress of dealing with expectations from many places at once.

***Subtheme two: workload.*** “In graduate school, the biggest source of stress has definitely been the coursework. Having to ready 5+ chapters for each class and having to prepare for discussions has been difficult.” –Participant 58

In the Workload sub-theme, 45 participants contributed to the conversation, describing a large amount of work creating high stress. Some participants discussed the sheer volume of work or how much time it took up while others discussed having multiple things due at the same time.

***Subtheme three: assessments.*** “Extremely time-sensitive course requirements in an IQ testing class. These required me to find a child within a certain age range to test, score the test, and have everything turned in within a 7-day spans. Messing up one protocol effectively invalidated all progress made with that specific test’s competency requirements, meaning you had to give at least 2 more on top of moving on to another test within the week.” –Participant 29

A total of 10 participants indicated responses within this sub-theme. These participants find that much of the work from learning to administer, administering, and then interpreting psychological assessments contributes to the most to stress. Many of these students indicated difficulty with factors such as having to find volunteers to assess, struggling to learn many assessments in a short amount of time, and a fear that they begin to administer assessments before they have truly mastered them.

***Subtheme four: time limitations.*** “Time...there is never enough. You can never get ahead in grad school because there is always something that you could be working on. Plus, there is not a lot of time for social life outside of studies.” –Participant 145

This subtheme was contributed to by 22 participants who all discussed the factor of time as being their greatest stressor. These participants indicated that they struggled with time

limitations and having to constantly prioritize their time. One graduate student even indicated having to choose responsibilities over dinner time. From due dates and deadlines to spending time in seminars and lectures, these graduate students indicate that they are the most stressed about managing the little time they have.

***Subtheme five: practicum/internship experience.*** “Balancing all activities requires for internship hours and classes (i.e., assessment, intervention, consultation, and supervision hours)”  
–Participant 56

A total of 6 participants indicated that the real world practice requirements for graduate students with school psychology programs were their biggest source of stress. These requirements are practicum and internship. Participants indicated feeling stressed about particular variables associated with practicum and internship (e.g. going over hours to finish everything) and others indicated these requirements more broadly (e.g. Internship, Practicum).

**Theme: personal reasons.** “Being far away from family and having unprofessional professors.” –Participant 61

This main theme was contributed to by 26 participants and 3 sub-themes. These participants indicated that their largest source of stress within graduate school involved personal issues such as illness, mental health difficulties, and poor relationships with colleagues and professors.

***Subtheme one: unexpected stressors.*** “Personal family issues”. –Participant 62

While only 3 participants contributed to this sub-theme its importance seems evident. These participants were dealing with heightened stress due to challenges that could not have

been predicted such as sudden illness or family difficulties. One participant described the challenge of being diagnosed with lupus during an already challenging time.

***Subtheme two: mental health/emotional challenges.*** “Feeling pulled in many different directions.” –Participant 77

This subtheme consisted of 7 responses and had to do with participants who contributed their biggest area of stress to the emotional challenges and mental health difficulties that they were experiencing or had experienced. Students indicated broad challenges such as imposter syndrome, or feeling like you are not good enough to be doing what you are doing to specific areas of mental illness such as PTSD.

***Subtheme three: environment of program.*** “My largest source of stress has come from my professors. I felt like I had no support and that they did not care about my success as a professional. For the last year of my schoolwork my professors tried to drop me from the program for standing up for my professional goals. Honestly, the professors are the downfall of my program.” –Participant 194

The final subtheme within Personal Reasons had 16 contributions. Participants discussed experiencing high stress due to a range of environmental factors. Some students indicated dealing with poor peer relations or lack of quality feedback on assignments. One student indicated being a student of color in a program where they are a minority.

## **Qualitative Analysis #2: Unutilized Support Item**

The first qualitative support question inquired, “For supports offered but not utilized, please explain why you did not use them.” One hundred and fourteen participants responded to this question in the survey. Thematic analysis of the participant’s responses to why some

available supports were not utilized indicated a total of four main themes and eight sub-themes (See Table 10). For a full list of participant responses see Appendix B.2.

The four main themes included (1) Low Quality of Support Provided (2) Receives Outside Support (3) Don't Need Support (4) Obstacle Preventing Access to Support. Two of the resulting themes included four sub-themes while the other contained no sub-themes.

Table 10. *Identified Themes in Unutilized Support Item*

Main Themes	Sub-Themes
Low Quality of Support Provided	Lack of Communication/Information Target of Support Infrequency of Support Not Worth It
Outside Support Utilized	
The Support Isn't Needed	
Obstacles Preventing Utilization	Time Barrier Resource Barrier Mental Health/Emotional Barriers Stigma Barrier

**Theme: low quality of support provided.** “My student mentor is so unorganized and not helpful at all. She approached me once at the very beginning and since then we have never communicated.” –Participant 189

This first main theme incorporated 4 sub-themes relating to the availability of low-quality versions of support. For these participants, it was viewed that the support was offered in name but, it was offered in such a way that it was not beneficial to the participant. Therefore, the support went unutilized.

**Subtheme one: lack of communication/information.** “I was never informed about the mental health program from my graduate program.”—Participant 17

This sub-theme was addressed by 9 participants and included discussion of the lack of communication regarding the availability of support or information about how utilize it. This sub-theme also contained discussion of mentors and advisors who did not communicate with them at all—regularly.

***Subtheme two: target of support.*** “I often find that things offered are geared toward younger students or students without families. Events may be happy hours, or other non-family friend times or events where I would not feel I am able to bring my child.” –Participant 102

Perceptions expressed within this second sub-theme (3 responses) referred to the ways that supports only help or appeal to some graduate students and not to them personally. Responses indicated that many sources of social support through social events were not geared towards older students or students with children/spouses.

***Subtheme three: infrequency of support.*** “Only having these things offered once a year.” –Participant 151

Thoughts and feelings within this third sub-theme (5 responders) indicated an infrequent or rare availability of the support. Responders indicated that the infrequency of the support made it difficult to utilize with a busy schedule.

***Subtheme four: not worth it.*** “When away from school work, it's not appealing to be around school sponsored events; it feels like forced fun instead of relief.” –Participant 84

This sub-theme was addressed by 3 participants and included discussion of disinterest in the unutilized supports offered. Some participants indicated the lack of participation of other program faculty and students to make it uninteresting and others indicated a more broad disinterest.

**Theme: outside support utilized.** “I had a partner with a high-paying job and did not need to access additional financial supports.” –Participant 130

This second main theme was contributed to by 9 participants. This main theme contained no sub-themes. The participants within this theme indicated that they value and utilize support outside of the program which makes them not need to available organized support.

**Theme: the support isn’t needed.** “I never felt like I needed the counseling center.” –Participant 133

This third main theme had 16 total participants and contained no sub-themes. These participants indicated a lack of need for the availability of the unutilized support. Unlike theme three, these participants simply did not have a need to be filled.

**Theme: obstacles preventing utilization.** “There are often scheduling conflicts that make it impossible to utilize these supports. With classes, a graduate assistantship, a 2nd job, and study time, there is almost no time to attend these supports.” –Participant 190

This fourth main theme incorporated 4 sub-themes relating to a lack of resources or some other barrier physically or mentally keeping participants from utilizing a support. In total, 77 participants included responses within this main theme. Subthemes focused on a lack of resources allowing participation (e.g. transportation), an unavailability of time for utilizing the support, emotional or mental health barriers, and finally the barrier of stigma for needing to utilize resources.

**Subtheme one: time barrier.** “One of my professors hosts a daily meditation but my schedule doesn't allow me to go.” –Participant 29

The participants (N=52) within this sub-theme indicate that their schedules and hectic work/school life do not allow for the unutilized supports. They indicate that they do not have enough time available to seek out the help they need.

***Subtheme two: resource barrier.*** “Almost all of the opportunities offered by my school/program would require me to find child care, which I cannot afford.” –Participant 80

The participants (N=13) within this sub-theme indicated a lack of resources necessary for utilizing the support that was offered. These participants indicate things such as financial cost of finding child care, a lack of transportation, or distance from the location of the support.

***Subtheme three: mental health/emotional barriers.*** “My anxiety also leads me to avoid some of those events.” –Participant 124

A small number of participants (N=3) indicated that they struggled to utilize the available supports due to issues with mental health or emotional barriers. Regardless, of the small number of participants indicating this response, it seems worthy of recognition. Some participants indicated social anxieties while others indicated that they were experiencing too high of stress to participate.

***Subtheme four: stigma barrier.*** “Students who openly express high-level stress more than once are typically put on a personal growth plan. Everyone avoids it like the plague because it actually increases your responsibilities and you are monitored more closely by the faculty. So essentially you have students who are already overworked and stressed and the response is to create weekly meetings to fit into their already tight schedule and go through their ridiculously long to-do list to help them plan their time. If you don't 'graduate' out of the PGP within a year,

you are dropped from the program. It is high-stakes and incredibly anxiety inducing.” –

Participant 174

Participants (8) within this sub-theme indicate that they feel like they cannot seek out available supports because it may stigmatize them as incapable or label them as a burdensome student. Furthermore, students falling into this sub-theme also indicate not seeking out counseling services provided through the university due to other graduate students working within the university counseling center.

### **Qualitative Analysis #3: Additional Supports Item**

The second qualitative support question inquired, “within your school psychology program do you feel that you are provided any other additional supports? Supports can work to aid you financially, socially, educationally or career-wise, and in any other helpful facet.” Forty-four participants responded to this question in the survey. Thematic analysis of the participant’s responses to what other supports outside of those discussed in the survey, produced a total of four main themes (See Table 11). For a full list of participant responses see Appendix B.3.

The four main themes included (1) Academic/Career Support (2) Collaborative Environment (3) Faculty understanding and encouragement (4) Cohort Support.

Table 11. *Identified Themes in Additional Supports Item*

Main Themes	Sub-Themes
Academic/Career Support	
Collaborative Environment	
Faculty Understanding and Encouragement.	
Cohort Support	

**Theme: academic/career support.** “We receive a lot of reminders and guidance concerning deadlines for classes that need to be taken, certification exams, internship process and so on.” –Participant 165

This first main theme was brought up by 6 participants. These participants found the ways in which their program’s support them academically through things such as feedback, keeping them aware of opportunities, helping find internships and even goal planning have all been big areas of support.

**Theme: collaborative environment.** “The collaborative environment of my program (including professors and peers alike) has provided vast opportunities to address many of these supports throughout my time with the program.”—Participant 54

This main theme was discussed by participants (N=9) to involve the openness between students and faculty to develop a positive program environment where students can easily work with each other as well as with faculty. Many of these participants also mention the factor of communication among students and faculty.

**Theme: faculty understanding and encouragement.** “The availability of my faculty has played a role in managing my stress. The fact my faculty always makes a visible effort to make time for me has been beneficial in building a great relationship which in turn has increased the comfortableness of opening up to and reaching out to faculty about stressful situations.” – Participant 99

A total of 20 separate participants discussed the valuable support they receive from an available and understanding faculty member. This theme contains discussion of professors who

listen and have genuine rapport with students who feel they can trust their faculty. Many students discuss the value of kindness and flexibility within a faculty member.

**Theme: cohort support.** “We have strong relationships with peers in our cohort which provides a lot of support in our personal and academic lives.” –Participant 176

This fourth theme was contributed to by 9 participants. This theme involved the discussion of cohort members as a means for social and academic support. Many of these participants spoke of a shared sense of friendship for one another.

**Qualitative Analysis #4: Support Ideas Item**

The final support qualitative question asked, “In what other ways do you feel that a program can work to reduce the stress of its students?” One hundred and twenty participants responded to this question in the survey. Thematic analysis of the participant’s responses to what other supports outside of those discussed in the survey, produced a total of three main themes and eight sub-themes (See Table 12). For a full list of participant responses see Appendix B.4.

The three main themes included (1) Academic/Career Support (2) Collaborative Environment (3) Faculty Understanding and Encouragement.

Table 12. *Identified Themes in Support Ideas Item*

Main Themes	Sub-Themes
Academic/Career Support	Internship and Research Support Coursework Support Clear and Reasonable Expectations
Collaborative Environment	Planning Courses Faculty and Student Communication Financial Support Prioritizing Self-Care as a Program Social Support
Faculty Understanding and Encouragement	

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**Theme: academic/career support.** “Students are very much "on their own", even to the point of having to find test subjects (for academic, cognitive, etc.) which has been hard for people new to the program. The school is also very unhelpful in assisting students in helping students to find internship opportunities.” –Participant 136

This first main theme was contributed to by 45 participants and 3 sub-themes. The Academic/Career support theme included discussions of the ways that its faculty support students in finding and working through internships, research, coursework, and in the development of clear and reasonable workload expectations.

***Subtheme one: internship and research support.*** “I think it would be beneficial to offer more guidance on resume building/internship interview preparation.” –Participant 21

This first sub-theme includes 7 participants who all discussed a need for more support in finding and holding internships as well as in conducting research.

***Subtheme two: coursework support.*** “Providing access to texts or materials in advance to allow more time to read ahead of the course beginning.” –Participant 62

This second sub-theme of Academic/Career Support includes 12 participants who each discussed a desire for more academic support within their coursework and career development.

***Subtheme three: clear and reasonable expectations.*** “Maintaining realistic expectations from advisors or program faculty (e.g. no emails after a certain time).” –Participant 102

This third sub-theme included 26 participants. These participants were largely concerned with high workloads that they perceive to be unmanageable and unclear. Many participants

indicate that there is a lot of additional work involved that does not pertain to their goals or the necessary requirements of a school psychology graduate student.

**Theme: collaborative environment.** “Psychoeducation about work/life balance, stress management, and advocating for your needs. Also, programs showing concern over student stress and burnout rather than treating it like a rite of passage.” –Participant 130

This second main theme was contributed to by 52 participants and five sub-themes. The participants within this main theme discussed ways that programs could better organize social activities, financial support, communication between faculty and students, plan courses, and prioritize self-care.

**Subtheme one: planning courses.** “I think professors should communicate their course schedules before the semester so that students are not overloaded across their classes at the same time. It would also be helpful to know how much out of class work/shadowing/practicum is necessary each semester before the semester begins so that students can coordinate work and personal schedules ahead of time.” –Participant 195

Of the eight responses from participants addressing the way programs organize courses, all of them discussed a need for faculty to get together when planning schedules so that student’s do not have overlapping areas of high work-load alongside other high workload requirements (e.g. volunteer hours, practicum, research).

**Sub-theme two: faculty and student communication.** “Allow students and faculty to meet every semester to discuss issues or concerns about the program.” –Participant 42

While only 6 participants contributed to this sub-theme. It is of note that students indicate a need for more available communication between themselves and the program faculty in order

to discuss needs, ask questions, and provide input. These students indicate a desire for more collaboration to be built into the program itself.

***Sub-theme three: financial support.*** “Provide more opportunities for financial assistants or offer programs that help guide students through the Public Student Loan Forgiveness program and process.” –Participant 172

This sub-theme includes discussion among 13 participants in regard to the need for programs to work to improve both the financial assistance and financial resources that they offer the students within the program.

***Sub-theme four: prioritizing self-care as a program.*** “We need self-care to be not only talked about and hypothetically supported but actually supported by policies and practices at school.” –Participant 147

From self-care planning and built in self-care time within long classes (e.g. 3 hour courses), the 20 participants who contributed to this sub-theme want programs to take more responsibility for improving the self-care habits of school psychology graduate students.

***Sub-theme five: social support.*** “Providing events or activities that allow us to spend time together without the need to worry about coursework or clients.” –Participant 56

Although only five participants contributed to this sub-theme, they each included discussion of a need for more built-in social supports within their school psychology graduate programs.

**Theme: faculty understanding and encouragement.** “Appear genuine, include teaching skills that challenge students ignorance, protect students of color throughout the process.” – Participant 101

A total of 22 participants contributed to this main theme. This theme contains both broad and specific discussions of a need for faculty that are both understanding and caring as students work through their graduate programs and begin working in the field of school psychology.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

### **Overview**

In order to better understand the relationship between support and stress and to aid school psychology programs in improving support provided to school psychology graduate students, this study surveyed school psychology students nationally. In doing so, masters-specialist and doctoral school psychology graduate students completed measures of stress and support. These measures provided both quantitative and qualitative information about the perceptions and experiences of school psychology graduate students.

### **Stress and Support**

This research study questioned whether the amount of total support organized within a school psychology program would correlate with the amount of Total Perceived Stress and Level of Stress that school psychology students report. Furthermore, it questioned whether there would be a relationship between Total Perceived Stress, Level of Stress, and the Type of Program, Year of Program, and Cohort Size.

In conducting data analyses, it was determined that the Level of Stress measure was not a valid measure of graduate student stress and could not be used for further analyses. This measure showed large variability and did not appear to be fully understood by participants. For these reasons, all comparisons involving stress were conducted using the Perceived Level of Stress-14 measure (PSS-14).

The first question that data analysis aimed to identify was whether a relationship existed between Total Perceived Stress and Total Support. The correlational analyses indicated that a significant relationship was not present between these variables. Perceived Stress is not lower

among school psychology graduate students who report receiving higher levels of support from their graduate programs via the Total Support measure. However, despite a lack of significant relationship in these results, it is important to keep in mind that a great deal of literature regarding the potential of a stress—support relationship indicates that support acts as a moderator between stress and mental illness. As shown in the Wang et al., research, those who reported more support and high stress indicated lower frequency of diagnosed mental illness (2015). Yet, students with high stress and low support, indicated higher frequencies of diagnosed mental illnesses. If the current study had examined mental illness as a result of stress with support as a moderator, significance may have been found. In future research, support should be looked at through the lens of moderator on mental health rather than as a stress-reduction technique.

Furthermore, in the examined literature that did directly look for relationships between stress and support, including the Yusufov et al. (2019), metaanalysis, the support—stress relationship was examined through support interventions built into graduate programs. The amount and quality of a support available was prescribed and checked for fidelity. The significant stress reduction that occurred took place under controlled settings. For our graduate students, it is likely that looking at overall support did not predict stress because regardless of whether it was available, the quality or frequency of the support is not indicated. Therefore, for students who (as indicated in qualitative analysis support questions) were provided supports in name but not in action, this relationship wouldn't exist because the function of support was not truly being served. For example, some students within the qualitative section indicated that they were assigned a peer mentor (i.e. they indicated “yes, I receive this” automatically raising their

Total Support score) but in all actuality they reported that their peer mentor was typically too busy to listen to them or provide them with advice. Some students even indicated that they had only spoken with their peer mentor once or twice. In future research looking for a direct stress reduction relationship from implementation of support, some form of quality and frequency of availability measure should be obtained. This should be done in order to examine whether high quality supports may act as a stress reducer.

The individual types of support that student's reported receiving were also examined for a relationship to Total Perceived Stress. Within the correlational analysis, Total Social Support, Total Financial Support, and Total Academic/Career Support were not significantly correlated to Total Perceived Stress. However, Total Emotional/Mental Health Support was significantly correlated to Total Perceived Stress. At higher levels of reported stress, lower levels of Emotional/Mental Health Support were provided. Furthermore, Emotional/Mental Health Support was shown to predict Total Stress. As indicated with the Total Support measure and its relationship to stress, many of these measures contain items that while considered to exist in name may not actually translate to quality and frequency of support. However, the items within emotional/mental health support largely indicate things such as an openness of professors to listen to them. These types of items are descriptive in the quality of support being obtained thus, reducing the impact of supports that are only available in-name but not quality. For example, if the student indicates that, "my program's mentors allow students to speak openly about stress or other emotional needs and receive support." Students are indicating specific qualifying behaviors associated with having a mentor as an emotional support.

### **Program Type, Program Year, and Cohort Size**

The next major question within this research was whether the Program Type, Program Year, or Size of Cohort variables would correlate with the Total Perceived Stress reported by school psychology graduate students. Little to no research examining these factors was present within the literature but this question was pursued in order to determine whether they may be important questions for graduate programs to consider.

Data analyses conducted in order to examine these possible relationships found that there were no significant relationships between Total Perceived Stress and Type of Program, Year of Program, and Cohort Size.

In order to answer exploratory questions for consideration of further research, additional analyses were conducted. First, it was hypothesized that while a relationship between Program Type, Program Year, and Cohort Size didn't exist with Total Perceived Stress, it may exist with Total Support.

Results of a one-way ANOVA indicated that students within Masters and Specialist programs indicated significantly lower total support than those in Doctoral programs. The effect of Type of Program on Total Support was small. There is no research available for examining the differences in support by program type. In future research, this mechanism should be further examined.

Another one-way ANOVA illustrated a significant relationship and a medium sized effect between Year of Program and Total Support received. In further examination of the relationship between Year of Program and Total Support, a Turkey's HSD post-hoc test found that average Total Support between graduate students in their 2nd Year and those in their 6th Year were

significantly different. Second year graduate students illustrated significantly higher levels of Total Support than those within their 6<sup>th</sup> year. Again, there is not a body of research surrounding this question and this study's findings. This may indicate that while students receive a lot of support at the start of school psychology programs, there is a lot less available to further along students. It is possible that programs feel a greater need to support incoming students and do not prioritize support for further along students. Future research should examine a possible drop off in school psychology graduate student support over time.

Correlational analyses found a significant relationship between Cohort Size and Total Support. Furthermore, Cohort Size was found to predict Total Support. Results indicated that as Cohort sizes increase, the amount of support available also decreases. In looking at the Standard Error of Measurement, it was indicated that a Cohort size of 6 to 12 was optimal for receiving support. It is possible that as cohorts become larger, students have less access to supports as there are more students within the program—taking up more supports. Furthermore, the students in the smallest cohorts also display less support than those in the 6 to 12 range. This may reflect less available support. For example, within the qualitative measure, many students indicated that they receive a lot of academic and social support through their cohort members. School psychology is a field that suffers from shortages and one proposed solution often discussed among practitioners and researchers within the field is to increase cohort sizes (Castillo, Curtis, & Tan, 2014; Curtis, Hunley, & Grier, 2004). However, another predicament within the field is a lack of school psychology faculty (Castillo, Curtis, & Tan, 2014). An increase in the size of cohorts accepted into school psychology programs may reduce support (i.e. less supervisors available to focus on individual student needs). It is important that further research be conducted in this area.

As illustrated by the Tukey's HSD post-hoc test examining Total Social Support by cohort sizes, social support was much higher within cohorts with 6-12 members in comparison to those with 13 and up. This may be illustrating the notion that these graduate students receive a good deal of support from within medium sized cohorts because they are in a succinct group and due to smaller numbers they all have the chance to develop relationships. As mentioned before, many students indicated that they receive social support through cohort relationships.

Within the Tukey's HSD post-hoc test, it was also shown that the average amount of reported Financial Support was significantly different between participants with a cohort size of 0-5 and those with a cohort size of 13 and up. Furthermore, significantly different financial support was found between participants with cohort sizes of 6-12 and 13 and up. These findings illustrated that there are less financial supports available for students in larger cohort programs. The available financial resources are likely having to be split between more students and/or receiving them is more of a competitive process.

A Tukey's HSD post-hoc test showed that the average amount of reported Academic/Career Support was significantly different between participants with a cohort size of 6-12 and those with a cohort size of 13 and up. As mentioned above, there are national shortages of school psychology faculty (Castillo, Curtis, & Tan, 2014). It is likely that in larger cohorts, less access to individualized support through professors is available. Furthermore, in a field where a great deal of supervision is required, it is likely that professors of large cohorts (13 and up) have less time available for high quality feedback and guidance for each student they oversee.

## Qualitative Findings

### Stress

A large body of graduate student stress research has been examined and used to illustrate major sources of stress for students within fields such as nursing and clinical psychology. In order to examine the major sources of stress as they exist within school psychology programs, qualitative data was collected. Five distinct themes were identified in participant's responses to the question of what the largest source of stress has been within graduate school: (1) Research, (2) Work-Life Balance, (3) Finances, (4) Program Expectations, and (5) Personal Reasons.

Regarding the first identified theme, participants emphasized stress resulting from research expectations and requirements. A large portion of responses within this theme indicated that research was difficult to complete on top of many other requirements. This theme is consistent with previous research examining the stressors of graduate students in the field of psychology (El-Ghoroury et al, 2012). For graduate students in this particular field, research may be particularly difficult to time-manage. Beyond research, school psychology graduate students are working to complete graduate practicum requirements and important coursework requirements. In order to complete a NASP certified school psychology program, it is required that students obtain practicum experience working in schools. Furthermore, for students obtaining specialist or doctoral degrees in school psychology, 1200-1500 hour internships must be completed. In future research it may be necessary to examine how much support is built in to support research specifically.

The Work-Life Balance theme included participant responses that illustrated either a broad or specific difficulty with balancing out life and work. Participants described feeling like

they were having to choose between family/friends and the study of school psychology. This finding is consistent with research regarding graduate student stress (Gastelum et al., 2018; Rummell, 2015). In the 2012 study of graduate school student stressors conducted by El-Ghoroury et al., 58.7% of graduate students indicated that a poor work-life balance was their greatest area of stress. As mentioned within the previous theme, it appears that this may be even more of a challenge for graduate students in the school psychology field where there are a number of varying requirements for completion of the degree. In future research it may be beneficial to examine how school psychology students split up their time in both professional and personal life. This may shed light on the poor work life balance identified in this current research as well as the larger body of research.

Finances was the third major theme to arise within this study. Participants within this theme indicated that they were most stressed by the debt they were accumulating and the cost of living that they were struggling to meet. Financial debt is a major concern among participants. One student even discussed the contradictory notion that school psychologists are highly needed due to national shortages yet, so few financial supports are made available. In examining the average debt of a school psychology graduate student, \$72,181.8, it can be seen that more support in this area is needed (Doran et al., 2016). Furthermore, this finding is also consistent with the body of literature examining graduate student stress. 63.9% of graduate students within the El-Ghoroury et al., study indicated that finances were a major area of stress (2012). Congruent with our findings, this was the third most dominant stressor indicated by graduate students in the El-Ghoroury et al., study (2012).

The next large theme found within this question is Program Expectations. Within the Program Expectations theme, school psychology graduate students indicated that they felt that the biggest source of stress they face is the stress associated with unrealistic and unclear academic expectations. The largest sub-theme to emerge within Program Expectations was Workload. Workload contained 45 statements and indicated that these students perceived the high volume and time intensity of the workload to be their greatest source of stress. This theme was again congruent with the work of El-Ghoroury et al., (2018) who found that “Academic/Coursework Pressures” are the largest source of stress for psychology graduate students. This finding is also consistent with the literature in which high workload expectations and unclear expectations are consistently reported by graduate students as areas of concern (Jacobsen, Eaton, Brown, Simmons, McDermott, 2018). In action research conducted with a range of graduate programs, making program expectations more clear and consistent improved graduate student outcomes (Jacobsen, et al., 2018). Similar action research within school psychology graduate programs may be of particular importance due to the wide breadth and depth of coursework, practical experience, and research required.

The last theme to emerge within this question was Personal Reasons. Participant’s commented on having experienced unexpected stressors such as medical issues, mental health challenges, difficult professional relationship (e.g. advisor relationship) and a lack of connection with the department. The Environment of Program (i.e. Subtheme 4) is highly consistent with the current body of research. In several studies, variables such as poor advisor relationship and academic environment/climate have been rated as important contributors to stress (Cotterall, 2011; Golde, 2005; Ives et al, 2005; Leijen et al., 2016; Lin, 2012; Litalien et al., 2015). This

body of research spans from STEM fields to clinical psychology programs and points to the notion that a poor academic advisor and competitive program environment can negatively impact graduate student outcomes. It is also of note that within the El-Ghoroury et al., research, mental health difficulties and physical health difficulties were also shown to contribute to graduate student stress (2012). Within the El-Ghoroury et al., study 35.1% of participants reported depression and 33.7% reported physical health issues (2012).

### **Support**

After examining the perceptions of school psychology students in regard to stress, this study wanted to understand more about the perceptions and experiences of these students in regard to support. This information was collected in order to guide future research as well as to aid school psychology programs in improving outcomes for students. Three qualitative questions inquired about supports offered within programs but not used, supports available within their program but not included in the support measure, and finally, what supports they feel would help reduce stress within their graduate programs.

For supports available but not utilized, four main themes emerged: (1) Low Quality of Support Provided (2) Receives Outside Support (3) Don't Need Support (4) Obstacle Preventing Access to Support. Furthermore, 4 sub-themes emerged. The first theme to emerge, Low Quality of Support addressed a perception that while a support was offered in name, the way it was offered was not actually helpful. These responses spanned from issues with unavailable mentors, little information regarding how to access the support, providing the support very infrequently, to feeling as though support was built for certain types of students but not all students (e.g. older students). This theme really draws to light that while a support may exist for a student to check

off of a list as available, it may not be a quality support with the potential of lowering stress or serving the needs of graduate students. As programs work to provide supports to graduate students, they should consider not just what to provide but how to provide it so that it is truly a beneficial support worth utilizing. Supports should be available regularly and monitored for quality. This theme is consistent with research regarding quality of mentors and quality of advisor support in which lowered mental illness and lowered stress were tied to higher quality of advisor and mentor support (Latona, 2001). The quality of these supports was often measured by availability, rapport, and provision of resources and information.

The two themes, *Receives Outside Support* and *Don't Need Support*, describe students who feel that they do not need one support or another because of having it provided in some other way or not having a need for the support in general. For example, a student's program may offer mental health resources that they may not feel the need for or they receive those services outside of the program. It is important to consider that while offering options to students is important, some students may not need them or are receiving them privately.

Lastly, the theme of *Obstacle Preventing Access to Support* emerged. This theme contained several sub-themes in which different types of barriers arose for students. These barriers involved things such as time, access to transportation, emotional inability to seek out the support, and even a stigma barrier in which students felt that if they took advantage of the support they would be labeled in a negative way. In most research regarding support, support is often looked at as the answer to problems but for some students within this study, support was something that was not provided in a way in which they could access it. Going forward, school

psychology program must consider whether the supports they offer are obtainable by all of their students. If not, alternatives should be provided.

The second support question prompted participants to discuss supports that they have received within their school psychology program that were not listed in the support checklist measure. This provided additional information about the ways that programs may be positively supporting their students outside of the supports mentioned in the survey. Four main themes emerged from this: (1) Academic/Career Support (2) Collaborative Environment (3) Faculty understanding and encouragement (4) Cohort Support.

The first main theme indicated that some student's report receiving additional academic/career support such as valuable feedback from research advisors and professors, reminders about deadlines and other certification guidance, and even support in goal setting and planning. It is these student's perception that their professors provide additional professional and academic support to them outside of what they are required to provide. This is consistent with the support research that has found academic and career support of this nature to be important for graduate student satisfaction, mental health, and prevention of later career burnout (Chiang; 2003; Cotterall, 2011; Golde, 2005; Ives, Rowley, 2005; Leijen, Lepp, & Remmik, 2016; Litalien, Guay, 2015; Lovitts, 2008; McAlpine, Amundsen, 2009). Furthermore, this is consistent with the stress research findings of this study and the body of research as a whole. As discussed, a major contributor to stress is academic/coursework pressures from research to more broad program expectations. Therefore, having a professor or faculty member actively working to guide and support graduate students, stood out to some of the students of this study as having been particularly important for them.

The second theme to emerge was Collaborative Environment. These students indicated that the climate of their program has been something they found to be helpful in supporting their academic and emotional needs. These students indicate that they can work together with faculty and peers in a successful and beneficial way. This theme is consistent with research regarding social and academic support in which students have shown better outcomes when they have a collaborative environment allowing for support from both peers and professors (Wallace, York, 2019). It is of note that research into collaborative climates within graduate programs have found that they play a significant role in building up the diversity of a program. Diversity is a major area of need for school psychology. As of 2015, 87% of school psychologists were white/Caucasian and 83% were female (Walcott et al., 2017). School psychology programs can consider building up the collaborative climate within their programs as not only a way of building up student supports but also as a way of improving diversity across the field of school psychology.

The third theme, which was the largest and most common theme within this question indicated that students felt that they were supported through an understanding and caring faculty member. These students indicated a professor within the program who has been encouraging and shown great compassion. Whether it was during a time of outside stressors such as medical problems or during a difficult academic time, these professors are described as flexible and compassionate. It seems of great note that certain behaviors such as open-doors and responsiveness to difficult situations are highlighted within this theme as making a difference for many students. One student summed this up perfectly in saying, “A great advisor truly has made all the difference!” This finding is consistent with research in the area of emotional/mental health

support through faculty members. Research examining the role of faculty member as a place of emotional support through understanding and encouragement during trying times has found many positive impacts in graduate student outcomes (Pearson, 2012). Furthermore, this area of support may be consistent with the research surrounding quality of advisor relationships. A large body of evidence has shown that a strong and positive relationship between student and advisor/supervisor is linked with better academic and later career outcomes (Chiang; 2003; Cotterall, 2011; Golde, 2005; Ives, Rowley, 2005; Leijen, Lepp, & Remmik, 2016; Litalien, Guay, 2015; Lovitts, 2008; McAlpine, Amundsen, 2009; Pauley, Cunningham, & Toth, 1999).

The last main theme to emerge within this category was Cohort Support. Participants indicated that a very important area for receiving academic, social, and emotional support was from cohort members. From helping each other understand requirements and work through assignments to spending time with each other and building friendships, these students feel that their cohort has been a major source of support. While less research exists in the area of cohort support acting as a mechanism for more positive outcomes, this finding may reflect program climate research in which more collaborative programs show greater student outcomes (Wallace et al., 2019).

The final qualitative support question provided information about other ways that school psychology students feel their programs could help to reduce stress. This information was obtained in order to find out more about what students perceive that they would benefit from. Furthermore, it was included in order to guide future research regarding program support and to provide school psychology graduate programs with information about supports that may benefit

students. This question resulted in three main themes: (1) Academic/Career Support (2) Collaborative Environment (3) Faculty Understanding and Encouragement.

In many ways the additional supports indicated by students in the second question emerged as desired supports among students within the third support question. All three of the main themes that emerged within this question reflect three out of the four themes from the second qualitative support question (i.e. (1) Academic/Career Support (2) Collaborative Environment (3) Faculty Understanding and Encouragement). It is telling that these supports have impacted the students within the second question enough to warrant the students indicating them as areas of support. Furthermore, when other students who aren't receiving these were prompted to consider what other supports they think might benefit them, these themes emerge. Overall, the consistency between these two questions may indicate that Academic/Career Support, Collaborative Environment, and Faculty Understanding and Encouragement should be prioritized when working to improve school psychology programs.

### **Limitations**

The PSS-14 was used to gather a measure of overall stress for the school psychology graduate student sample. This measure collects a reading of overall stress from within the last month. The measure was administered during the month of January. January is typically the first month of Spring semester classes. It may be that a higher level of stress would present itself within the middle or end months of a semester. The PSS-14 measure does not provide a full picture of graduate school stress. Unfortunately, the Level of Stress measure, developed by the researchers to provide a measure of graduate school stress as a whole, was not a valid measure due to significant variability. In future research, a modified attempt to use a measure of stress as

it relates to graduate school experience as a whole (similar to that attempted through the Level of Stress measure) should be attempted.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The field of school psychology is suffering from a national shortage of school psychologists and graduate programs may be able to aid in the effort by increasing the numbers of professionals within this field. High levels of stress have been tied to attrition within programs as well as tied to mental illness and later career burnout. Furthermore, support has been shown to alleviate the impact of stress on mental health as well as to alleviate later career burnout. This study examined overall support provided through school psychology graduate programs in order to determine whether stress was directly related to the availability and utilization of program organized support. In doing so, it has found that overall support has a relationship with Cohort Size, Type of Program, and Year of Program. Furthermore, it was shown that as participants indicated greater Emotional Support, they indicated less stress. However, Total Support did not have a significant relationship with Total Stress.

This study also sought to provide programs with ways of further supporting and lowering the stress of their students through qualitative stress and support questions. These questions illustrated that sources of stress for school psychology graduate students are largely consistent with those examined in other research (Research, Poor Work Life Balance, Finances, Program Expectations, and Personal Reasons such as medial issues or mental illness). Furthermore, in examining why students who are provided support may not utilize it, could lead to areas for further research surrounding Low Quality of Support Provided, Outside Support Utilized, The Support Isn't Needed, and Obstacles Preventing Utilization were identified. Finally, in the last

two questions it was shown that the areas of Academic/Career Support, Collaborative Environments, and Faculty Understanding and Encouragement may be of most importance when prioritizing ways for improving support within school psychology graduate programs.

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## APPENDICES

### **Appendix A: Measure of Stress and Support within School Psychology Programs**

*Note: Self-Care measure has been excluded from Appendix A because it was not reported on within this research.*

Western Carolina University  
Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study

Project Title: Examining the Stress Levels of School Psychology Graduate Students

This study is being conducted by: Nicole Zelhofer, B.S., Hannah Anderson, B.A., Dr. Lori Unruh, PhD.

Description and Purpose of the Research: You are invited to participate in a research study examining the stress levels of school psychology graduate students as well as the support provided by programs and the self-care practices that school psychology students utilize. By doing this study we hope to learn more about what school psychology programs can do to reduce the stress of graduate students.

What you will be asked to do: You will be asked to complete a survey regarding your experience with stress in graduate school, supports that your program has provided, and sources of self-care. Additionally, demographics (age, gender, race) will be collected in order to report on the generalization of our population. The data collected will not include your name, program name, or other identifying information. The survey is estimated to take approximately 10 minutes.

Risks and Discomforts: We anticipate that your participation in this survey presents no greater risk than everyday use of the Internet. This survey will inquire about stress levels and the ways in which they may have impacted you. Identifying this may be stressful.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. The study may help us better understand the stress levels of school psychology students and ways in which stress can be reduced for this population.

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security: The data collected in this study are anonymous. This means that not even the research team can match you to your data. Research will be collected with the Qualtrics survey anonymous link. The data collected will be stored in an encrypted



1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?
4. In the last month, how often have you dealt successfully with irritating life hassles?
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life?
6. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
7. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
8. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?

9. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?

10. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?

11. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?

12. In the last month, how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?

13. In the last month, how often have you been able to control the way you spend your time?

14. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Considering your time in graduate school, please approximate the percentage of time you have spent experiencing each level of stress defined below. You will not be allowed to have a total over 100%.

The total time you have been in graduate school is symbolized with 100%. If you have felt Typical level of stress for more than half of graduate school you would drag the bar past 50% and then indicate what level of stress you felt for the rest of your experience.

\_\_\_\_ Typical: some stress but it does not impact personal life and or graduate school work

\_\_\_\_ Moderate: stress that has some negative impact on personal life and/or graduate school work

\_\_\_\_ Significant Stress: stress that has a large negative impact on personal life and/or graduate school-work

\_\_\_\_ Extreme: stress that is debilitating to both personal life and/or graduate school work

How much has graduate school stress impacted your performance in the program?

- A great deal
- A lot
- A moderate amount
- A little
- None at all

How much has graduate school stress impacted your personal life?

- A great deal
- A lot
- A moderate amount
- A little
- None at all

Have you ever considered dropping out of the program due to high levels of stress?

- I have never considered it
- I have thought about it once or twice
- I have seriously considered it

When considering other students in your program, do you feel like you are experiencing more stress, less stress, or about the same amount of stress?

- Less stress
- About the same
- More stress

How would you compare your stress level as an undergraduate to your stress level as a graduate?

- Much less stress
- Less stress
- About the same stress
- More stress
- Much more stress

What has been your largest source of stress within graduate school?

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The items below describe different things that graduate programs may do to help relieve the stress of graduate school for students. For each item, please indicate whether the statement is true or false within your particular school psychology program. If true please describe how often you take advantage of this resource/support. If false, move on to the next true/false statement.

For example, if your program offered free cheesecake, how often do you take advantage of that cheesecake? If you took the cheesecake every time it was offered, you would indicate Very Often. If you only took the cheesecake once you would indicate Almost Never.

	<b>Availability</b>					<b>Utilization</b>	
	False	True	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often
1. My program hosts social events that provide time to	<input type="radio"/>						

speaking with and  
engaging in activities  
with faculty,  
students, or career  
psychologists.

2. Within my  
graduate school or  
program I have  
been educated  
about options for  
financing my  
education. For  
example,  
information about  
loans or loan  
forgiveness  
opportunities.

3. My program  
faculty have  
encouraged me to  
take advantage of  
NASP's Graduate  
Student Support  
Network (GSSN)  
or another  
established NASP  
mentoring program  
such as the NASP  
Convention  
Mentoring  
Program or the  
Diversity and  
Leadership  
Mentoring  
Program.

4. My program educates us about emotional and mental health resources such as an on-campus counseling center.

5. Within your program you have been encouraged to participate in planned social events intended for socializing/bonding rather than discussing program topics/news.

6. Within my graduate program I have received advice regarding scholarships, summer assistantships, or other ways of reducing financial burdens.

7. My program has a mentorship program in which academic and career advice and support is offered. This can include a built-in relationship between a student

and faculty, a further along student and a newer student.

8. My program's mentors allow students to speak openly about stress or other emotional needs and receive support.

9. My program creates a collaborative climate in which students can build friendships with peers, faculty, or career psychologists.

10. Within my graduate program I have the opportunity to earn money, reduce tuition, or be supported financially through some form of assistantship, internship, or other work-resource.

11. My program encourages and helps build mentorship

relationships with  
career  
psychologists who  
can help guide you  
as you begin  
working in the  
field.

12. My program  
hosts workshops or  
provides other  
dedicated resources  
regarding ways of  
improving mental  
health or managing  
stress.

For supports offered above but not utilized, please explain why you did not use them.

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Within your school psychology program do you feel that you are provided supports that go unmentioned above? Please describe these briefly.

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In what other ways do you feel that a program can work to reduce the stress of its students?

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What type of program are you in?

- Masters-Specialist
- Doctorate

Please indicate which year of your program you are in.

- Year 1
- Year 2
- Year 3
- Year 4
- Year 5
- Year 6

How many people are in your cohort (i.e. students who entered your school psychology graduate program the same year as you)?

\_\_\_\_\_

I identify my gender as:

- Male
- Female
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

I identify my ethnicity as:

- Asian
- Black or African American
- Caucasian
- Hispanic/Latinx
- Native American
- Pacific Islander
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Current age: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Largest Source of Stress Within Graduate School

Largest Source of Stress Within Graduate School	
Theme	Responses
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Theme 1: Research</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">N=11</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dissertation;</li> <li>2. My thesis;</li> <li>3. Dissertation research (data collection);</li> <li>4. Research requirements;</li> <li>5. Completing research milestones and <i>personal life events</i>;</li> <li>6. <i>Internships</i>, thesis, and dissertation;</li> <li>7. Thesis/Dissertation and always feeling behind on it (and all other work in graduate school);</li> <li>8. Dissertation and <i>comprehensive exam preparation</i>;</li> <li>9. Writing my thesis/research;</li> <li>10. Research productivity being added on top of clinical and teaching responsibilities;</li> <li>11. Due dates for my master's project, <i>homework, and reading</i></li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Theme 2: Work-Life Balance</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Subtheme 1: With friends, partners, kids, and families</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">N=14</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Balancing home (family/kid) with the program;</li> <li>2. Trying to find meaningful time to spend with my significant other while staying on top of everything;</li> <li>3. Managing time between work, family, and school;</li> <li>4. My personal life such as work and leaving my children to attend school that is traditional;</li> <li>5. School-<i>work</i>-family balance;</li> <li>6. Balancing schoolwork with responsibilities as a parent and spouse;</li> <li>7. I am a single mother of three so managing all my requirements is difficult;</li> <li>8. No work-life balance;</li> <li>9. Family obligations outside of school having an impact on my availability to do school-related work;</li> <li>10. Juggling all graduate school responsibilities while also personal and social ones. <i>Also, the stress of providing adequate care to clients/imposter syndrome</i>;</li> <li>11. Trying to balance my time between homework, my baby, taking care of our house, and my relationship with my husband. Trying to prioritize what's most important;</li> <li>12. Balancing school classes, assignments, internship, work, and social life;</li> <li>13. Time spent away from family-drive time to program and practicum;</li> <li>14. Balancing grad school demands with being a parent of two young children;</li> </ol>

<p><i>Subtheme 2:</i> <i>With other jobs</i></p> <p>N=10</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Balancing all program requirements, schoolwork, practicum duties, graduate assistantship duties, and having 2 other jobs to afford life;</li> <li>2. Not the program or workload, my stress comes from my job;</li> <li>3. My largest source of stress has been balancing my workload with my part-time job, <i>plus finding practicum/internship placements. I have also been stressed by the amount of work that needs to be done and I often feel like there are not enough hours in the day to do it. Additionally, I have felt stress over the fact that I do not have my license yet because it takes me quite a while to get to and from school;</i></li> <li>4. Time to dedicate to reading and assignments while balancing working full time and family responsibilities; Balancing academic work, multiple jobs, and personal life. <i>Thinking about future career, such as resume, interviewing, or being prepared;</i></li> <li>5. Balancing graduate school requirements with working 25 hours a week;</li> <li>6. Balancing 3 jobs with personal relationships, family, and academics;</li> <li>7. Having to work a fulltime job to afford the cost of living in my area and <i>unexpected changes in my graduate classes because the program is fairly new;</i></li> <li>8. Trying to balance an incredible amount of work with outside obligations like working enough to cover my bills;</li> <li>9. Managing working full time (I'm a special education teacher), managing my marriage and home responsibilities with attending class and the homework load;</li> <li>10. Trying to work 20 hours a week while going to graduate school full time and living 35 minutes from campus</li> </ol>
<p><b>Theme 3:</b> <b>Finances</b></p> <p>N=14</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Finances,</li> <li>2. Financial;</li> <li>3. Lack of finances/resources to cover costs of school and daily living;</li> <li>4. Lack of money, <i>amount of work;</i></li> <li>5. Financial issues and commute;</li> <li>6. Cost, <i>lots of work to do;</i></li> <li>7. Finances, <i>worry about job security after graduation;</i></li> <li>8. Personal finances and amount of debt that is accrued/accruing;</li> <li>9. Financial hardships <i>and transitioning my family;</i></li> <li>10. #1 is finances-It means I have to manage working full time (or paying out of pocket), <i>staying with my cohort, finding time for personal/family time, and completing everything that needs to be done;</i></li> </ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Financial-related stress as well as <i>not having enough time to complete work to the best of my abilities each day</i>;</li> <li>12. Money;</li> <li>13. Money;</li> <li>14. Financial stress/<i>family-work balance</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Theme 4: Program Expectation</b></p> <p>N=99</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. RAship;</li> <li>2. Workload;</li> <li>3. Finding examinees, coordinating assignments between school and fieldwork, the amount of work for classes in addition to fieldwork;</li> <li>4. The required time commitment and <i>lack of friends/family in new location</i>;</li> <li>5. Spread thin across research, class, internship, and <i>trying to have a life outside of it</i>;</li> <li>6. Managing time between assistantships, classwork, and research;</li> <li>7. Assignments;</li> <li>8. Unclear expectations or deadlines;</li> <li>9. Finding children to test;</li> <li>10. Balancing responsibilities;</li> <li>11. Learning assessments;</li> <li>12. Limited time to complete everything—<i>maintaining work and school and personal life</i>;</li> <li>13. Trying to balance schoolwork and my assistantship, there is barely time to make dinner sometimes. <i>And going out and having fun? Only happens during school breaks</i>;</li> <li>14. Extremely time-sensitive course requirements in an IQ testing class. These required me to find a child within a certain age range to test, score the test, and have everything turned in within a 7-day spans. Messing up one protocol effectively invalidated all progress made with that specific test’s competency requirements, meaning you had to give at least 2 more on top of moving on to another test within the week;</li> <li>15. Internship;</li> <li>16. Finding students to test for assessments. Finding an internship placement;</li> <li>17. Assessment;</li> <li>18. The amount and length of assignments across classes;</li> <li>19. Lack of communication with the program expectations;</li> <li>20. Balancing having enough time to complete assignments/ prepare for tests and <i>having time for self-care/spending quality time with my husband</i>;</li> <li>21. The uncertainty of whether I am fulfilling specific requirements to finish my program (i.e., coursework, APEX deadlines, graduation application);</li> <li>22. The large workload and length of program;</li> </ul>

23. Needing to do work with students, finding participants;
24. Balancing various and sometimes competing demands for time and energy/*co-occurring personal life-challenges (e.g. death of family members)*;
25. Amount of work and *working on myself*;
26. Worry about whether I'm getting all the requirements;
27. Figuring out my schedule-everything has to happen between 8-3 (school practicum, assistantship, clinic, data collection, etc.);
28. Balancing all activities required for internship hours and classes (i.e., assessment, intervention, consultation, and supervision hours);
29. In graduate school, the biggest source of stress has definitely been the coursework. Having to ready 5+ chapters for each class and having to prepare for discussions has been difficult;
30. Too much to do;
31. Balancing coursework with outside responsibilities;
32. Writing papers for classes;
33. Work quantity;
34. Deadlines and *work-life balance*;
35. The time commitment as far as the time it takes to actually sit through class and then having to allocate time to complete assignments and readings;
36. Workload;
37. The amount of hands on things you do outside of the classroom and the time you have to put into it;
38. Balancing all of the expectations across the various domains (clinic work, *research work*, coursework, *Master's thesis*, *personal life*);
39. Too many assignments due on the same day;
40. Tests and papers- *looking for a job*;
41. Paper writing, impossibly large reading requirements;
42. Expectations to fit everything into your schedule;
43. Managing multiple assignments with end-of-semester due dates;
44. Trying to manage my time with homework/readings, *not slacking on my fulltime job, and making sure I don't give up my personal/social life completely*;
45. The assessment courses offered by the program;
46. Meeting deadlines;
47. The amount of duties that the program expects us to uphold;
48. I think most of my stress comes from worrying I will walk into class clueless or that I will have nothing to give to the conversation;
49. Keeping up with everything;
50. Deadlines;

	<p>51. Time management of work outside of class, especially with extensive reading assignments;</p> <p>52. Time limitations on assignments/reading/practicum work;</p> <p>53. Coursework;</p> <p>54. Adequately learning all of the material and achieving appropriate grades, all while finding time to continue my research;</p> <p>55. All of the reading material and feeling the need to have to memorize it all;</p> <p>56. My largest source of stress in grad school so far has been having to balance the program and a new city to live in. Finding students that would be willing to get tested on my own in a city where I knew no one prior to moving there was extremely stressful;</p> <p>57. Workload, scheduling/fitting in all obligations, and <i>research endeavors</i>;</p> <p>58. Time management;</p> <p>59. Coursework;</p> <p>60. Lack of time;</p> <p>61. Large loads of coursework;</p> <p>62. Time management - particularly, having to go above hour requirements for applied experiences (practicum, internship) in order to fulfill my duties to clients and supervisors;</p> <p>63. Assignments for multiple classes and working on campus;</p> <p>64. Deadlines and finding time;</p> <p>65. Larger assignments;</p> <p>66. When I have to write big papers;</p> <p>67. Too much to do and not enough time;</p> <p>68. When all of my classes have large assignments due on the same day;</p> <p>69. Time...there is never enough. You can never get ahead in grad school because there is always something that you could be working on. <i>Plus, there is not a lot of time for social life outside of studies</i>;</p> <p>70. Internship;</p> <p>71. Workload from courses;</p> <p>72. Classes being unnecessary and a waste of time when they could have been useful if they were taught correctly;</p> <p>73. Overwhelming amount of assignments and the time it takes to complete each assignment to meet expectations. Also, unclear expectations make things more stressful;</p> <p>74. Having so much to do and not having enough time;</p> <p>75. Workload and lack of time;</p> <p>76. New responsibilities; The entirety of second year- taking four courses and completing a portfolio, along with doing practicum</p>
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	<p>twice per week, where there were responsibilities on top of class assignments. (not to mention working part-time);</p> <p>77. Writing assessment reports;</p> <p>78. Copious amount of assignments;</p> <p>79. The first year of graduate school had so much reading, assignments, and practicum that I didn't have time for self-care;</p> <p>80. Papers, deadlines;</p> <p>81. Completing required assignments and reading on time with a high level of quality;</p> <p>82. The amount of classes and then work that comes along with those classes taken during one semester;</p> <p>83. Tedious coursework;</p> <p>84. Unrealistic course load;</p> <p>85. Heavy workload;</p> <p>86. The amount of time assignments takes because I feel they need to be nearly perfect and thus it inhibits me from doing other important things in my life (spending time with loved ones);</p> <p>87. Feeling like I'm not keeping up with the material due to outside stresses and not performing to expectation as a result;</p> <p>88. Amount of course work and getting it done in time;</p> <p>89. The workload sometimes seems too ambitious considering all courses being taken;</p> <p>90. Amount of work, not getting opportunities I want, feelings of wasting time, no control over schedule;</p> <p>91. Balancing the classwork along with the demands of practicum;</p> <p>92. Increased workload with decreased time to do it;</p> <p>93. Managing all responsibilities;</p> <p>94. Program and faculty requirements;</p> <p>95. Having to find volunteer children to practice administering an assessment. There is some practicing of these assessments that happen, even though we have not had sufficient training on the assessment. There is also a lot of expectations as far as reading, but at the same time learning all the assessments we have to learn;</p> <p>96. Practicum;</p> <p>97. Workload, time constraint, and not understanding expectations;</p> <p>98. Lack of control over scheduling/additional last-minute tasks;</p> <p>99. The amount of schoolwork and readings</p>
<b>Theme 5: Personal Reasons</b>	
<i>Subtheme 1: Unexpected stressors N=3</i>	<p>1. Personal family issues;</p> <p>2. Medical issues;</p> <p>3. Lupus diagnosis</p>
<i>Subtheme 2: Mental</i>	<p>1. Being far away from family <i>and having unprofessional professors</i>;</p> <p>2. Feeling pulled in many different directions;</p>

<p><i>health/emotional challenges</i></p> <p>N=7</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Personal issues outside of grad school, specifically sexuality orientation;</li> <li>4. Imposter Syndrome;</li> <li>5. Balancing family trauma and personal PTSD with grad schoolwork expectations</li> <li>6. Persistent uncertainty that a career in this field is right for me</li> <li>7. Preparing for post grad</li> </ol>
<p><i>Subtheme 4: Environment of Program</i></p> <p>N=16</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social aspects, Peer relations;</li> <li>2. Professor feedback;</li> <li>3. A few other students in the program and faculty;</li> <li>4. Lack of quality feedback on assignments;</li> <li>5. Being a student of color navigating a predominately white department and not having my needs met nor understood, lack of support from advisor and department;</li> <li>6. Inconsistencies between what each of the professors say/expect, inconsistencies in how things are taught and how we are supposed to do something, <i>overbooking on assignments and required volunteer work because I feel like I am not doing my best because there is so much that is due and I'm required to go to that I rush through things to try to get them done and stay ahead;</i></li> <li>7. Inflexibility from the program, resulting in difficulty continuing to work fulltime; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advisory relationship and <i>academic writing</i>;</li> <li>Coordinating travel to conferences and interpersonal drama;</li> </ul> </li> <li>8. Professors;</li> <li>9. Waiting for feedback on critical assignments;</li> <li>10. Lack of effective communication between faculty and students;</li> <li>11. Faculty and schedules;</li> <li>12. My largest source of stress has come from my professors. I felt like I had no support and that they did not care about my success as a professional. For the last year of my schoolwork my professors tried to drop me from the program for standing up for my professional goals. Honestly, the professors are the downfall of my program;</li> <li>13. Advisor relationship and advisory style, <i>overly demanding workload</i>;</li> <li>14. Professors</li> </ol>

### Appendix C: Unutilized Supports

<b>Unutilized Supports</b>	
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<b>Theme 1: Low Quality of Support Provided</b>	
<p><i>Subtheme 1: Lack of Communication/Information</i> N=9</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of information about the support</li> <li>2. My student mentor is so unorganized and not helpful at all. She approached me once at the very beginning and since then we have never communicated.</li> <li>3. They have been touched upon extremely briefly -- maybe an email or one reminder in class. Can't help but forget it that way.</li> <li>4. I have applied for and inquired about assistantships but I either was overlooked (did not receive follow up from program director about opportunities when they opened up) or none were available by the time I inquired again to follow up.</li> <li>5. many of the things were mentioned but never encouraged and there is no program for mentorship. You have to seek your own opportunities</li> <li>6. did not know they existed</li> <li>7. Time to meet-up with a further along student was not always available. <i>It was left strictly on the students to communicate and create time as opposed to hosting time for gatherings.</i></li> <li>8. I didn't utilize the mentorship program with peers because my mentor never reached out after meeting her.</li> <li>9. I was never informed about the mental health program from my graduate program</li> </ol>
<p><i>Subtheme 2: Target of Support</i> N= 3</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. most events involve alcohol where some members of my cohort drink heavily and makes the events not enjoyable to attend</li> <li>2. Not a good fit for a non-traditional student</li> <li>3. I often find that things offered for graduate students are geared toward younger students or students without families. Events may be happy hours, or other non-family friend times or events where I would not feel I am able to bring my child.</li> </ol>
<p><i>Subtheme 3: Infrequency of Support</i> N= 5</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not offered frequently</li> <li>2. Mentorships began Just now in my last year of graduate school</li> </ol>

	<p>3. Not feeling comfortable with the supervisor; only having these things offered once a year</p> <p>4. They were not offered at convenient times or <i>they did not sound helpful</i></p> <p>5. My mentors are very busy and I am not close with them to talk about emotional needs</p>
<p><i>Subtheme 4: Not Worth It</i> N=3</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social events aren't attended well by others- so it's me, a few other students, and directors.</li> <li>2. When away from school work, it's not appealing to be around school sponsored events; it feels like forced fun instead of relief.</li> <li>3. My student mentor did not show up to the social event that was scheduled.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Theme 2: Outside Supports Utilized</b> N=9</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I do not use supports on campus because I choose to cope with my stress outside of the university or by exercising at the HPER center.</li> <li>2. I did not need financial help in graduate school as much as others, so I did not accept a graduate assistantship. Likewise, I did not need loan information.</li> <li>3. Social attitudes add to stress and are another thing I have to do. I can get together with friends on my own time.</li> <li>4. I have my own coping mechanisms that I feel work effectively</li> <li>5. I do not use the mental health supports on-campus because I go off-campus to utilize them.</li> <li>6. I see an outside therapist</li> <li>7. I had a partner with a high-paying job and did not need to access additional financial supports.</li> <li>8. Time constraints or <i>fulfilling that need in other ways</i> I receive counseling services outside of the school</li> </ol>
<p><b>Theme 3: The Support Isn't Needed</b> N=16</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I do not feel as though I need to use the counseling center.</li> <li>2. Didn't feel that I needed them</li> <li>3. I felt that I didn't need the extent of individualized counseling that our mental health resources offered</li> <li>4. Too busy (with school and working a part-time job) or <i>did not feel it was needed</i></li> <li>5. They are not applicable to me</li> <li>6. I don't need counseling.</li> <li>7. I never felt like I needed the counseling center.</li> <li>8. <i>I did not need financial assistance</i> or do not have time to work with mentors right now</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Lack of time for social events, <i>the programs advising structure made me feel equipped for the field so I rarely utilized other psychologist as support</i></li> <li>10. I don't need the mental health resources.</li> <li>11. <i>My stress hasn't been severe enough to warrant utilizing the on-campus counseling center.</i> Also, graduate students staff the on-campus counseling center, so I wouldn't go there because I don't want to pay to be counseled by my peers</li> <li>12. sometimes the last thing I want to do is something else that is school related</li> <li>13. I did not find the NASP support network a necessary resource for me</li> <li>14. I feel as though I have a great school/personal life balance and I do not have a need to have an appointment. I also know they're very busy so I'd rather someone who needs an appt gets one</li> <li>15. I feel like I don't need them</li> <li>16. Did not need counseling.</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Theme 4: Obstacles Preventing Utilization</b></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Subtheme 1: Time Barrier</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">N=52</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. lack of time</li> <li>2. Time constraints--it's hard to socialize after hours or attend workshops on weekends due to parenting responsibilities</li> <li>3. Have not utilized resources during internship or dissertation years because programs are held during the workday.</li> <li>4. Time conflicts</li> <li>5. I did not have time due to coursework demands.</li> <li>6. There are often scheduling conflicts that make it impossible to utilize these supports. With classes, a graduate assistantship, a 2nd job, and study time, there is almost no time to attend these supports.</li> <li>7. I live an hour away from the university and work full time in addition to attending graduate school. I also have 2 young children so it is difficult for me to attend events on nights and weekends.</li> <li>8. I do not have the time because I use free time for work and my kids</li> <li>9. Often time there are conflicts of scheduling.</li> <li>10. Time constraints</li> <li>11. lack of time</li> </ol>

	<p>12. I know of NASP's programs and I think the faculty have mentioned it, but I don't know that much about it really and feel so busy that I don't want to take the time to figure it out on my own.</p> <p>13. I am an older student with a family, so taking advantage of many of these services is just more time out of my schedule, which would cause conflict at home.</p> <p>14. Too busy (with school and working a part-time job) or did not feel it was needed</p> <p>15. I feel like I don't have any spare time. All of my time is filled doing homework, readings, or things at home.</p> <p>16. I commute to campus and it takes an hour each way. I don't have time to take advantage of things that aren't mandatory.</p> <p>17. I do not live near campus so I often could not drive the 1+ hours to attend/couldn't apply for the assistantships. I didn't have the time to apply for scholarships.</p> <p>18. time</p> <p>19. commuting student</p> <p>20. <i>They were not offered at convenient times</i> or they did not sound helpful</p> <p>21. time constraints</p> <p>22. <i>Sometimes the supports don't fit into my schedule,</i> sometimes i feel like i should be able to handle the stress without supports</p> <p>23. I don't know when I'd even have time to go to the counselor even if I wanted to.</p> <p>24. I did not need financial assistance or <i>do not have time to work with mentors right now</i></p> <p>25. <i>Time constraints</i> or fulfilling that need in other ways</p> <p>26. I have a family and a part-time job. The activities do not work along with my schedule.</p> <p>27. Cost or <i>time</i></p> <p>28. No time to utilize as much as desired</p> <p>29. <i>Lack of time for social events,</i> the programs advising structure made me feel equipped for the field so I rarely utilized other psychologist as support</p> <p>30. Time</p> <p>31. Given other responsibilities there is not enough time to take care of all them, so I prioritize ones aimed at reducing financial burden because that is the main source of my stress.</p> <p>32. A Holiday celebration is offered every year, but I don't have time to attend. <i>I also utilized financial aid rather</i></p>
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	<p><i>than scholarships, etc. due to the time required for applications.</i></p> <p>33. I felt that I did not have the time or energy to participate</p> <p>34. They are held at inconvenient times.</p> <p>35. Time - I have children at home and a commute to campus so attending extra events is not always easy for me</p> <p>36. Commute to university and city is an hour from my house</p> <p>37. Time and interest</p> <p>38. <i>Other Family/work commitments</i> Distance to events</p> <p>39. I live too far from campus and <i>don't have the time in my schedule.</i></p> <p>40. <i>It usually doesn't fit my schedule</i> or I am dealing with personal things that do not allow me to go or follow through. Basically too stressed to reap the benefits.</p> <p>41. Did not have time or did not want to</p> <p>42. No time</p> <p>43. <i>Time to meet-up with a further along student was not always available.</i> It was left strictly on the students to communicate and create time as opposed to hosting time for gatherings.</p> <p>44. Time constraints</p> <p>45. Time constraints - I live approx. 1 hour from my university so I avoid the commute on days I don't <i>*have*</i> to be there</p> <p>46. One of my professors hosts a daily meditation but my schedule doesn't allow me to go.</p> <p>47. Many of the social events were scheduled at times I had something else scheduled or needed the time to do coursework or just get some sleep.</p> <p>48. <i>I guess I am nervous to see the counselors at my school, either because I feel like I don't have the time</i> or because I'm not sure how my relationship would be with them.</p> <p>49. Time</p> <p>50. I don't have time.</p> <p>51. I don't have time or motive to invest in emotional counseling.</p> <p>52. I found that any free time I had I wanted to spend more with friends and family, rather than extra time on campus for services provided.</p>
<p><i>Subtheme 2: Resource Barrier</i></p>	<p>1. <i>I didn't have transportation, my anxiety also leads me to avoid some of those events.</i></p> <p>2. <i>Cost or time</i></p>

<p>N=13</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Almost all of the opportunities offered by my school/program would require me to find child care, which I cannot afford.</li> <li>4. <i>I do not live close to campus.</i> My program is online</li> <li>5. <i>Rarely on campus to utilize on-campus mental health center.</i> Also, peers in counseling psych program do their practicum in on-campus mental health center. #8. Although I can talk to mentors about stress, it doesn't always seem appropriate to do so.</li> <li>6. Other Family/work commitments, <i>Distance to events</i></li> <li>7. <i>I live too far from campus</i> and don't have the time in my schedule.</li> <li>8. Being a distance student makes it difficult to utilize many of the services offered.</li> <li>9. I work full time and <i>live over 2 hours from my campus.</i></li> <li>10. Distance from school/ relocated for internship</li> <li>11. Distant education, not on campus</li> <li>12. I sometimes use things but many activities are offered when I need to be home with my children</li> <li>13. Long distance student</li> </ol>
<p><i>Subtheme 3: Mental Health/Emotional Barriers</i></p> <p>N=4</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social Anxiety</li> <li>2. I wasn't interested, I didn't have transportation, <i>my anxiety also leads me to avoid some of those events.</i></li> <li>3. It usually doesn't fit my schedule or <i>I am dealing with personal things that do not allow me to go or follow through. Basically too stressed to reap the benefits.</i></li> <li>4. <i>I guess I am nervous to see the counselors at my school,</i> either because I feel like I don't have the time or because <i>I'm not sure how my relationship would be with them.</i></li> </ol>
<p><i>Subtheme 4: Stigma Barrier</i></p> <p>N=8</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students who openly express high-level stress more than once are typically put on a personal growth plan. Everyone avoids it like the plague because it actually increases your responsibilities and you are monitored more closely by the faculty. So essentially you have students who are already overworked and stressed and the response is to create weekly meetings to fit into their already tight schedule and go through their ridiculously long to-do list to help them plan their time. If you don't 'graduate' out of the PGP within a year, you are dropped from the program. It is high-stakes and incredibly anxiety inducing.</li> <li>2. sometimes i feel like i should be able to handle the stress without supports</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>3. Related to not using on-campus mental health resources, I worry about conflicts of interest or privacy, as the graduate students who work at the counseling center are students within my department.</li><li>4. I knew many of the people working in the counseling center, and couldn't make ends meet with a graduate assistantship</li><li>5. My stress hasn't been severe enough to warrant utilizing the on-campus counseling center. <i>Also, graduate students staff the on-campus counseling center, so I wouldn't go there because I don't want to pay to be counseled by my peers</i></li><li>6. Rarely on campus to utilize on-campus mental health center. <i>Also, peers in counseling psych program do their practicum in on-campus mental health center. #8. Although I can talk to mentors about stress, it doesn't always seem appropriate to do so.</i></li><li>7. Hard to speak honestly about experiences with people who have control over my career</li><li>8. My adviser is very open for me to speak about stress or other emotional needs, but I do not want to feel like a burden.</li></ol>
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## Appendix D: Additional Supports

<b>Additional Supports</b>	
Theme	Responses
<p><b>Theme 1:</b> <b>Academic/Career Support</b></p> <p>N=6</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The feedback provided by practicum supervisors and staff.</li> <li>2. We receive a lot of reminders and guidance concerning deadlines for classes that need to be taken, certification exams, internship process and so on.</li> <li>3. Additional faculty often forward emails with opportunities so we are kept up to date with assistantships or positions on campus as well as conference opportunities.</li> <li>4. Other supports are intentional goal planning with students. It helps to monitor progress and get feedback so you know that what your investing time and energy in is actually paying off.</li> <li>5. Help in finding internships</li> <li>6. My RA job allows me to intern under our program director, which has helped me gain extra experience in the field.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Theme 2:</b> <b>Collaborative Environment</b></p> <p>N= 9</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Frequent communication</li> <li>2. Direct access to university supervisor at any time.</li> <li>3. Our faculty's doors are always open so I feel comfortable talking to them about whatever I need</li> <li>4. The collaborative environment of my program (including professors and peers alike) has provided vast opportunities to address many of these supports throughout my time with the program.</li> <li>5. My program does a good job fostering cooperation rather than competition which really supports us.</li> <li>6. Open office hours with faculty. Very responsive and willing to work with us when we have concerns</li> <li>7. The faculty is often available to talk to and promote success in the program.</li> <li>8. Cohort and Faculty Support</li> <li>9. The best support they give is the ability to speak freely to professors and have open communication with faculty.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Theme 3: Faculty Understanding and Encouragement</b></p> <p>N= 20</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We talk about self-care in some classes and we made lists of self-care activities we engage in.</li> <li>2. Yes faculty are understanding when life events take precedence.</li> <li>3. one faculty was particularly helpful and encouraging</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. The professors are very emotionally supportive of students in our program and good listeners.</li> <li>5. The availability of my faculty has played a role in managing my stress. The fact my faculty always makes a visible effort to make time for me has been beneficial in building a great relationship which in turn has increased the comfortableness of opening up to and reaching out to faculty about stressful situations.</li> <li>6. I know that my professors are good about helping students when they reach out for assistance. For instance, of a student is struggling in a class or preparing for EPPP or Praxis.</li> <li>7. Yes, program director and most professors have been extremely understanding concerning medical issues and provided great support when requested.</li> <li>8. Open door policy with all faculty members as well as first-year meetings where we were very open about our own emotions and coping mechanisms throughout our transition.</li> <li>9. Faculty themselves are understanding. I had a family emergency this semester and had to miss the first week of classes which was stressful for me personally and academically. They were all understanding and supportive.</li> <li>10. We are each assigned an advisor for our Ed.S. project, however, I feel I can go to any professor when I'm struggling.</li> <li>11. I feel very supported by my advisor and professors. I feel that I could go to them if I needed, and I know that some of my classmates have done so.</li> <li>12. A few of our professors will take mental health checks in class and address them in real time. For example, our first year my cohort was very stressed and burnt out. Our professor canceled the planned lesson for the day and just had a talk-it-out session where we could all just air our stressors and take some time to calm down and be heard</li> <li>13. professors are very kind and flexible with assignments/due dates, encourage us to reach out to them if we are stressed and/or having difficulty</li> <li>14. My professors have all taken extra time and effort to have strong relationships with me. I feel comfortable talking to them about any issues and feel that they</li> </ol>
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	<p>care about my success. My program is small and at a small university. I'm not sure that they have a lot of extra resources to have "programs" in places for us graduate students, but they truly care about us students.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. The faculty is supportive and open to discuss any topics related to stress and wellbeing.</li> <li>16. My program consists of cohorts of 10 students so we are all close and open with each other and our professors.</li> <li>17. A great advisor truly has made all the difference!</li> <li>18. Yes. Because of my diagnosis, my professor's have worked with me.</li> <li>19. Yes, every faculty member in my program wants me to succeed and wants me to do well so they support me.</li> <li>20. I had a good relationship with my advisor and always felt supported by him.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Theme 4: Cohort Support</b></p> <p>N=9</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unstructured social activities with my PhD cohort.</li> <li>2. Support through cohort members, not officially sanctioned program events.</li> <li>3. Our program has a student org of 1st and 2nd year students that meets twice a month. This is a great way to pick older student's brains and display concerns we may not feel comfortable doing so to a faculty member.</li> <li>4. I feel that my program has a lot of social support (we are friends, we support each other etc).</li> <li>5. Our students really drive the boat on supporting each other and creating social and mentoring supports.</li> <li>6. Cohort support is vital.</li> <li>7. The cohort of students share a lot of information online and in text groups (especially when we don't get clarity from our professors)</li> <li>8. we have strong relationships with peers in our cohort which provides a lot of support in our personal and academic lives.</li> <li>9. My program consists of cohorts of 10 students so we are all close and open with each other and our professors.</li> </ol>

## Appendix E: Other Ways Programs Can Reduce Stress

Other Ways Programs Can Reduce Stress	
Theme	Responses
<b>Theme 1: Academic/Career Support</b>	
<i>Sub-Theme 1: Internship/Research Support</i>  N=7	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Providing much more support to students looking for internship sites</li> <li>2. Provide more support around requirements and procedures for securing practicum/internship</li> <li>3. Students are very much "on their own", even to the point of having to find test subjects (for academic, cognitive, etc.) which has been hard for people new to the program. The school is also very unhelpful in assisting students in helping students to find internship opportunities.</li> <li>4. Help with research guidance</li> <li>5. Address the burn-out factor more openly instead of pushing employment opportunities. Everybody's hiring, but are they retaining?</li> <li>6. Helping students to find research/assessment participants</li> <li>7. I think it would be beneficial to offer more guidance on resume building/internship interview preparation.</li> </ol>
<i>Sub-Theme 2: Course work Support</i>  N=12	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Maybe if they offered study sessions where the professor would be available for questions or help</li> <li>2. More feedback on performance</li> <li>3. Career help</li> <li>4. I also think student mentoring would be really helpful. Pairing us with a school psychologist in the community our first year would be helpful too. It would give more insight into how the job is in real life.</li> <li>5. our model is very course heavy our first semester and then we're thrown in head first to our clinic our second year, which causes a lot of stress. If they could find a way to prep the students more for clinic, that would be great.</li> <li>6. Providing better classes that prepare you for practice</li> <li>7. More talks with those currently in the field and reassurance through seeing success</li> <li>8. Have an advisor available</li> <li>9. Recommend ways to remain organized while completing the work.</li> <li>10. Providing access to texts or materials in advance to allow more time to read ahead of the course beginning.</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Allow for slower progress through the program so that career professionals can advance there career</li> <li>12. Having more information regarding structure and movement through the program</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Sub-Theme 3: Clear and Reasonable Expectations</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">N=26</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. having clear, reasonable expectations</li> <li>2. being more realistic about what they are asking students to do (what is REALLY) worth your time and</li> <li>3. Ensuring assistantships are at/under required work hours and aligned with students interests</li> <li>4. more organization and more hired hands to help teach and space things out in the program.</li> <li>5. Well-organized program with prediction.</li> <li>6. Valuing students' commitments and time</li> <li>7. Reduce the job load. Our program is expected to work in the schools, have multiple clients at the clinic, work 20 hours a week at an on-campus job and have a regular class load. That needs to be reduced.</li> <li>8. Having the work we do be quality rather than quantity. While there are so many avenues in the profession of school psychology, I believe allowing students to find a focus area to work on is better than having them complete menial tasks in all areas of school psych.</li> <li>9. Maintaining realistic expectations from advisors or program faculty (e.g. no emails after a certain time)</li> <li>10. Ensure work load is reasonable and not outrageous</li> <li>11. Clarify expectations in coursework, clinical experiences, and research. Communicate if things change and make things as streamlined and consistent as possible.</li> <li>12. Realistic expectations in terms of class assignments, especially readings and the lengths of papers. At a certain point in the program, it feels silly to be working on 22 page papers for class when we have practicum and actual client work, as well as research demands.</li> <li>13. Be more accommodating and understanding of working students. I feel that the program is designed and the professors only support full time students.</li> <li>14. not require all students to take a course that we do not receive credit for that takes up most of our time. have the professors work together when they are making their syllabus, we will learn how to do something one way with one teacher and the same thing a completely different way with a different teacher and will get penalized for it if we do not do it the way the teacher wants it.</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. Require less volunteer hours so I can focus on giving 100% for my assignments. Having events that are just for bonding and not talking about school or program requirements. I also think anonymous surveys about student stress and program satisfaction would be good because then we would feel like we could be honest without being penalized.</li> <li>16. Have more tentative timelines of expectations (when tot ake qualifying exams, comprehsnive exams, PRAXIS, etc.), advisors meet with mentees regularly (not jsut once a semester), students are treated consistently with expectations</li> <li>17. Assistance in prioritizing what is actually needed to be done compared to what's suggested.</li> <li>18. My program had so much work the first year and I think that could've been spread out. I think it'd be good to have maybe an option of either two years or three years in graduate school instead of trying to get everything done in two years.</li> <li>19. Value student's input about classes and class requirements</li> <li>20. Balancing out the workload through the semester to make it lead bottom heavy.</li> <li>21. More transparency, reduction of demands,</li> <li>22. Make time for student input. We as the students see things that could be adjusted to heavily relieve stress that maybe someone (professors) on the outside might not see. I know my cohort came up with several solutions to stress-promoting problems within the program that we felt would not conflict in ensuring that NASP standards were met.</li> <li>23. Reduction of responsibilities that may not be vital to our accreditation or learning</li> <li>24. Reduce duplication of information that is required reading by eliminating dated materials.</li> <li>25. Uphold advisors to consistent expectations, decreasing course requirements, reframing the dissertation and thesis as portfolios rather than extended academic articles.</li> <li>26. Allowing the opportunity to practice balance; being aware of additional commitments outside of school by not assigning things last minute or continuously changing schedules</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Main Theme 2: Collaborative Environment</b></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Sub Theme 1: Planning Courses</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">N=8</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I think professors should communicate their course schedules before the semester so that students are not overloaded across their classes at the same time. It would also be helpful to know how much out of class work/shadowing/practicum is necessary each semester before the semester begins so that</li> </ol>

	<p>students can coordinate work and personal schedules ahead of time.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. To have the professors get together at the beginning and throughout the semester to discuss out of class assignments, due dates, and other requirements and work together to create a flexible and efficient semester for their students. Also, finding out the existing free time of their students in order to schedule support events during times they can actually attend. If possible, providing students with a schedule including out of class assignments at least a week before the new semester starts in order to give students the chance to allot time in their schedules for these activities when creating their work/assistantship schedules.</li> <li>3. I would say adjusting due dates especially during stressful months so many projects aren't overlapping.</li> <li>4. During program faculty meetings, present the syllabus for each course and fill in a calendar (bearing in mind the amount of work required for each). Also lay out the daily schedule of most of the students, including classes, labs, and general number of hours spent in field-based experiences.</li> </ol> <p>If my program had done that, I think they would have realized that some of the expectations that were required of us were unrealistic. I think they also would have realized how many hours we were averaging beyond what our credit hours reflected. Another helpful tool would have been an anonymous survey that explicitly asked about stress and for program feedback. The stress of my program resulted in every single member of my cohort requiring medical attention at some point over the past two years. Women were not menstrating for 3 or more months at a time, over half were prescribed anxiety medication that they had not had a prescription for previously, and some had to go to the ER for circulation issues. Asking about health concerns and the average number of hours they are able to sleep will tell a program a lot about how stressed their students are. If the majority of students are indicating serious health concerns, personal life impact (e.g., not being able to go home for major holidays due to workload), and minimal sleep it will indicate that the program needs some adjusting. If only a few are having problems, the program can respond by providing more information on how to get help on campus and practice self-care.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. More communication between faculty members to review the amount of work being assigned simultaneously</li> </ol>
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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Communication throughout the department so every major assignment isn't due the same week.</li> <li>7. Coordination across classes concerning assignments.</li> <li>8. 1. Make sure the professors know their schedule and stick to it. I've had multiple problems with professors making last minute changes that complicate things or simply not telling me something important. 2. Split IQ into 2 related courses. It's almost too much work for the time we have. 3. Reduce or eliminate "professional development hours" requirements. Opportunities for this are limited and often conflict with major course priorities elsewhere or are inconvenient to the point of not being worth it.</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Sub-theme 2: Faculty and Student Communication</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">N=6</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ask for student input more</li> <li>2. Facilitate more collaboration</li> <li>3. I also believe it would be beneficial to have some type of system where students could voice their stresses and concerns directly to professors and have discussions about them.</li> <li>4. Communicate with us more rather than having us figure things out on our own</li> <li>5. Allow students and faculty to meet every semester to discuss issues or concerns about the program</li> <li>6. Always being available to answer questions</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Sub-theme 3: Financial Support</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">N=13</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase student assistantship funding</li> <li>2. Find internships with stipends</li> <li>3. Offer more financial aid.</li> <li>4. Offering consistent, comprehensive funding</li> <li>5. applying for more funding to support students.</li> <li>6. Providing full funding, provide funds to go to conferences, provide funds for conducting personal interest research projects</li> <li>7. Offer more financial aid</li> <li>8. Add more assistantship/funding opportunities so that students do not have to work so much outside of school.</li> <li>9. funding</li> <li>10. Since School Psychologist are in great need currently, their should be more grants and/or tuition waivers or loan forgiveness. I have found nothing but loans and some assistance for those who can afford the time to work while in graduate school.</li> <li>11. Also, knowing more financial options would have been nice. I had no idea that I qualify for programs, like SNAP, until I looked into that myself.</li> </ol>

	<p>12. Provide more opportunities for financial assistants or offer programs that help guide students through the Public Student Loan Forgiveness program and process.</p> <p>13. Help them earn money</p>
<p><i>Sub-theme 4: Prioritizing Self-Care as a Program</i></p> <p>N=20</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. More self-care workshops</li> <li>2. Encourage and provide time for physical activity and recognize that students have a life outside of the program.</li> <li>3. Activity fair to showcase self care practices.</li> <li>4. Allow time to actually practice putting up boundaries and practice self-care instead of it being a lofty abstract concept.</li> <li>5. The faculty can be good examples of school psychologists who engage in self-care and boundary setting.</li> <li>6. Host non-academic gatherings. Host stress-relieving workshops</li> <li>7. By fostering open communication between faculty and students and stating that faculty are aware most graduate students are students with growing adult lives and therefore have other responsibilities outside of the program. I think it needs to be made clear by faculty that while there are high expectations of graduate students, they are not expecting students to only eat, breathe, and sleep school psychology and the graduate course work. This needs to be explicitly address because most graduate students are natural over-achievers and are type A when it comes to fulfilling expectations or going above and beyond. If its not said that that is not always expected, then they could feel that it is.</li> <li>8. Mental health sick days as an excused absence</li> <li>9. Having more hard conversations and making room for self-care.</li> <li>10. Bring in a member of the counseling service to just have a presentation on what counseling is</li> <li>11. Discuss mental health/stress more openly and routinely</li> <li>12. Have weekly mental health offerings like yoga and or meditation series and mixers.</li> <li>13. Provide self-care breaks during long classes (yoga or structured/unstructured breaks). Provide additional resources to free mental health resources or provide mental health resources specifically within the program</li> <li>14. Psychoeducation about work/life balance, stress management, and advocating for your needs. Also, programs showing concern over student stress and burnout rather than treating it like a rite of passage.</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. We need self-care to be not only talked about and hypothetically supported but actually supported by policies and practices at school.</li> <li>16. encourage healthy self care events such as participating in a work out class or yoga class</li> <li>17. Maybe take a class period or two to act as self care classes</li> <li>18. really encourage going to counseling (even if one thinks they do not need it)</li> <li>19. Talk more with students about the fact that stress is to be expected rather than expecting students just "deal with it" and perform at a level higher than current faculty.</li> <li>20. The program should provide more resources and spend much more time on the topic of stress rather than just an email.</li> </ol>
<p><i>Sub-theme 5: Social Support</i></p> <p>N=5</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. End of semester get togethers, designated study times with classmates</li> <li>2. More social events</li> <li>3. Providing events or activities that allow us to spend time together without the need to worry about coursework or clients.</li> <li>4. Establish a mentor program between students; provide social events for students outside of program related activities</li> <li>5. Allowing opportunities to engage in social events</li> </ol>
<p><b>Main theme 3: Faculty Understanding and Encouragement</b></p> <p>N=22</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Providing support, listening to the complaints and hardships of students, providing clearer expectations and guidelines</li> <li>2. Openness to student needs.</li> <li>3. Open communication</li> <li>4. Grace</li> <li>5. Hearing out our concerns instead of just saying everything will be fine/work out</li> <li>6. Help students to seek psychological support and offer more frequent free food/meals</li> <li>7. Having open communication with students</li> <li>8. creating a sense of relationships between students and mentors</li> <li>9. Supportive staff</li> <li>10. appear genuine, include teaching skills that challenge students ignorance, protect students of color throughout the process.</li> <li>11. Listen to concerns and approach them genuinely</li> <li>12. I think that my program was very rigid and the expectation was that you should fit in the "box". If you didn't your stress increased. There needs to be a higher level of support for students who are not traditional.</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. I think there needs to be an acknowledgment of the stress levels of the students among the faculty and an effort to understand that moving forward.</li> <li>14. Requiring mental health checks (a visit to CAPS each semester), being available to students for more than academic assistance (emotional support, etc.).</li> <li>15. There is a lack of empathy (or even sympathy) for the financial sacrifices people make to be in the program. There is also a lack of sympathy for how hard it can be to balance work/graduate school demands.</li> <li>16. I guess in terms of reducing stress I would say to just have weekly check-ins about how we are doing school wise and mental health wise.</li> <li>17. Faculty being more caring and compassionate to students. Faculty understanding the reality of life more and expecting less to control your entire life.</li> <li>18. Better relationship with faculty and students, more interactions</li> <li>19. Actuality follow through on our mentorship program with faculty and students. We only see our mentor one day out of the semester and it is just to give you feedback from the faculty evaluations of your work</li> <li>20. continue to be flexible with due dates/able to move them around if need be</li> <li>21. Listen and actually care about their students.</li> <li>22. Have more understanding for students who struggle and more lenient with the amount of school work.</li> </ol>
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