



Mental Wellness of Graduate and Professional Students

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Executive Summary

Mental health by gender - There was no considerable difference between male and female students in the areas of Positive Affect and Well Being. Female students tended to report more anxiety, depression and psychological distress compared to their male counterparts. Male students had slightly better mental health overall.

Mental health by race/ethnicity - Asians/Pacific Islander students were more likely to report psychological distress and depression. International students also reported higher levels of depression, although, they were less likely to be anxious. White students had lower levels of depression compared to other groups. There was no significant variation to report among other race/ethnicity groups in terms of mental health. No significant results were found between international students and domestic students for overall mental health.

Graduate students enrolled in special fee programs had the highest mental health followed by professional fee programs. Dental, Law and Medicine students reported to be very close to the average mental health. Graduate students enrolled in the academic programs had poorer mental health among the groups.

Introduction

This brief utilizes data collected through the 2010 Student Affairs Graduate and Professional Student Survey to provide insight to the mental health and wellbeing of graduate and professional students. The survey employed a set of measures developed by RAND that consisted of 17 individual items that were combined into a set of six composite scales: Overall Mental Health Index, Positive Affect, Psychological Wellbeing, Psychological Distress, Anxiety, and Depression. The individual items and the

scale each item falls under are shown in Figure 1. Comparisons were conducted by gender, ethnicity, fee structure and major field.

Differences and similarities between domestic and international graduate and professional students were also highlighted. Domestic ethnic groups included in the analyses were Asian /Pacific Islander, White, American Indian/Alaskan, Black, and Latino/ Chicano/Mexican-American. Major Fields included Arts and Architecture, Dental, Law or Med School, Education & Information Studies, Engineering, Health Science Academic, Humanities, International Institute, Life Science, Management, Nursing, Physical Science, Public Affairs, Public Health, Social Science, Special Fee programs and Theater, Film and TV.

The items asked survey respondents about the frequency of their experience of various feeling states on a 5-point scale. The Student Affairs Graduate and Professional Student Survey employed the RAND¹ items with a 5-point scale rather than the original 6-point scale. The scales are composite measures calculated by averaging the scores of multiple individual items. The scale scores range from 1 to 5. This 5 point scale allows for comparisons among different scales even though each is constructed using different numbers of individual items. When interpreting the scale scores, a 1 translates to never and a 5 translates to always.

Overall State of Mental Health

Graduate and professional students who took the survey reported 3.4 to 3.6 out of 5 for the first three sub-groups: overall Mental Health, Well Being and Posi-

Table 1. RAND Mental Health Scale Items

| How much of the time during the past month... | Positive Affect ($\alpha=0.739$) | Psychological Wellbeing ($\alpha=0.921$) | Psychological Distress ($\alpha=0.786$) | Anxiety ($\alpha=0.780$) | Depression ($\alpha=0.897$) | Overall Mental Health Index ($\alpha=0.935$) |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Has your daily life been full of things that were interesting to you? | X | X | | | | X |
| Have you felt loved and wanted | | X | | | | X |
| Have you been in firm control of your behavior, thoughts, emotions and feelings? | | | X† | | X† | X |
| Have you felt calm and peaceful? | X | X | | | | X |
| Have you felt emotionally stable? | | | X† | | X† | X |
| Have you been a happy person? | X | X | | | | X |
| Have you felt cheerful, lighthearted? | X | X | | | | X |
| Have you been a very nervous person? | | | X | X | | X† |
| Did you feel depressed? | | | X | | X | X† |
| Have you felt tense or high strung? | | | X | X | | X† |
| Have you felt downhearted and blue? | | | X | | X | X† |
| Hav you felt restless, fidgety or impatient. | | | X | X | | X† |
| Have you been moody or brooded about things? | X† | | X | | X | X† |
| Have you been anxious or worried? | | | X | | | X† |
| Did you feel you had nothing to look forward to? | | | X | | | X† |
| Have you felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up? | | | X | | X | X† |
| Have you been in low or very low spirits? | | | X | | X | X† |

5-point scale: 1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Most of the time; 5 = Always. †=reversed coded

tive Affect. It showed that overall mean for the first three positive mental health items, graduate students fell between sometimes and most of the time, indicating relatively frequent positive emotional states. For three negative scales, Anxiety, Psychological Distress and Depression, students were between 2 and 3, meaning rarely and sometimes. Among the three negative mental health measures, Anxiety was reported highest at 2.83 out of 5.

Comparison by Gender

There was no considerable difference between male and female students in the areas of Positive Affect and Well Being. However, Female students tended to have more anxiety, depression and psychological distress compared to their male counterparts. Overall, male students had 0.08 point higher in mental health index than female students. Although it was statistically significant, the difference between the two groups was relatively small. (See table 2)

Comparison by Race/Ethnicity

Looking at mental health among racial ethnic groups, (Table 3) Asian/Pacific Islander graduate students were more likely to report psychological distress and

depression. International students also reported higher levels of depression, although, they are less likely to be anxious. White students had slightly lower levels of depression compared to other groups. There was no significant variation to report among other race/ethnicity groups in terms of mental health. When the measures were compared between international students and domestic students, no significant results were found.

Comparison by fee structure

The comparison of the measures grouped by fee structure revealed that Special Fee Programs had the best mental health followed by Professional Fee Programs. Dental, Law and Medicine reported very closely to the average. Graduate students enrolled in the academic programs, however, had poorer mental health. Refer to the Appendix Table A2 for the crosstab of major fields by fee structure.

Comparison by Major Field

Six measures of RAND Mental Health categories will be discussed in this section. In the bar charts, a line representing the average score will be shown respectively. Bars in yellow represent the major fields re-

Figure 1: Overall State of Mental Health

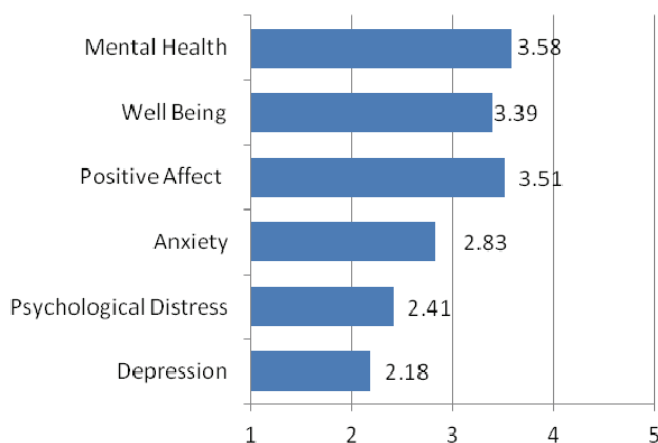


Table 2: Comparison by Gender

| Gender | Positive Affect | Psychological Distress | Well Being | Anxiety | Depression | Mental Health |
|--------------|-----------------|------------------------|------------|---------|------------|---------------|
| Male | 3.53 | 2.35* | 3.57 | 2.75* | 2.13* | 3.63* |
| Female | 3.50 | 2.46* | 3.58 | 2.90* | 2.22 | 3.55 |
| All Students | 3.51 | 2.41 | 3.57 | 2.83 | 2.18 | 3.58 |

* P<0.05

porting the score for each measure higher than the average. And the blue bars represent lower.

Comparing the positive mental health measures with the negative measures by major field, analysis revealed some trends. Mental Health Index is the composite score that combine all the individual items in order to produce a single measure for overall mental health and wellbeing of the students. The results from this measure are consistent with the pattern we see in this report. Special Fee students and Management students were on the top of the Mental Health chart while Theater, Film, and TV students were at the bottom. Engineering students also had poorer mental health than the average but the difference is less than 0.1 point.

Psychological Well-being and Positive Affect measures reveal similar patterns in line with overall Mental

Health Index. Education & Info Studies students reported higher Positive Affect score than average, however, they reported lower Well-being score than average. Reversely, humanity students reported lower Positive Affect score than average while reported to have higher Well-being score than average. Although the difference was statistically significant, the amount was minimal. Schools of Engineering and Physical Science reported to have a fifth of a point lower Well-being score than average, with the statistical significance of $p < 0.05$. Theatre, Film and TV and Social Science programs were also low scorers but the outcomes were not statistically significant. Along with the overall trends, Management, Nursing and Life Science students remained mentally healthier beside Special Fee students.

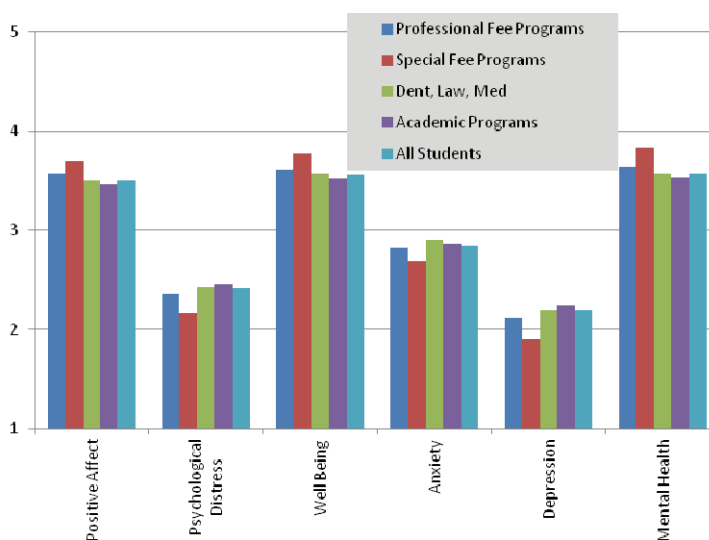
Social Science students, on the other hand, reported to have the least amount of positive affect in the past

Table 3: Comparison by Race/Ethnicity

| Race/Ethnicity | Positive Affect | Psychological Distress | Well Being | Anxiety | Depression | Mental Health |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|------------|---------|------------|---------------|
| International Students | 3.53 | 2.44 | 3.52 | 2.72* | 2.29* | 3.55 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 3.52 | 2.49* | 3.57 | 2.90 | 2.27* | 3.52 |
| White | 3.49 | 2.38 | 3.57 | 2.84 | 2.13* | 3.60 |
| American Indian/Black | 3.44 | 2.29 | 3.52 | 2.68 | 2.10 | 3.67 |
| Latino/Chicano/Mexican-American | 3.50 | 2.44 | 3.53 | 2.82 | 2.24 | 3.56 |
| All Students | 3.53 | 2.42 | 3.61 | 2.95 | 2.14 | 3.59 |
| All Students | 3.51 | 2.41 | 3.57 | 2.83 | 2.18 | 3.58 |

* $P < 0.05$

Figure 2: Mental Health by fee structure



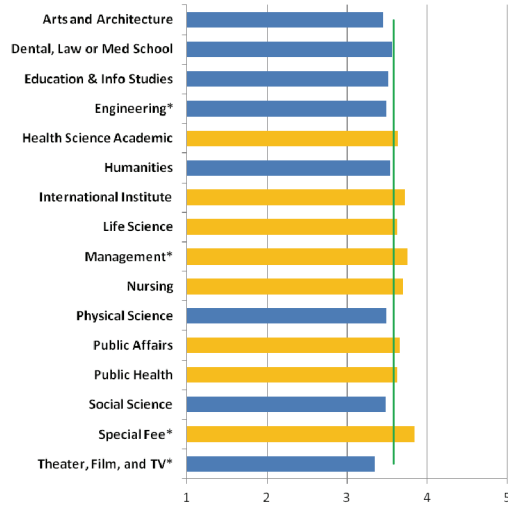
month of the survey entry. In the area of Psychological Distress, Students from Theatre, Film, and TV reported to have the highest impact with a third of a significantly above the average.

Only two groups with statistically significant outcomes for Anxiety measure were Special Fee and Theater, Film, and TV major fields. Again, Special Fee and Management students had lower score of depression. Engineering students joined the Theater, Film and TV students in terms of reporting the significantly higher score in Depression.

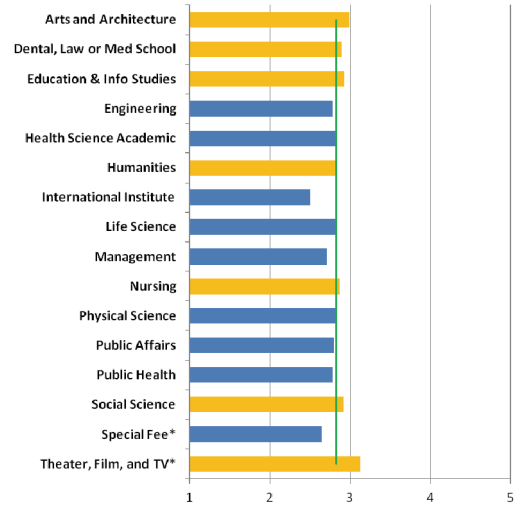
Overall, students in management programs were significantly more positively affected compared to their counterparts in other major fields. Social science students, on the other hand, reported to have the least amount of positive affect in the past month of the survey entry.

Figure 3. Comparison of Mental Health by Major Field

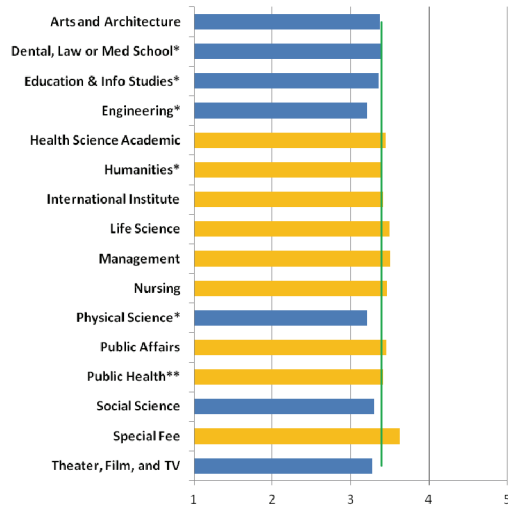
Mental Health (Average = 3.58)



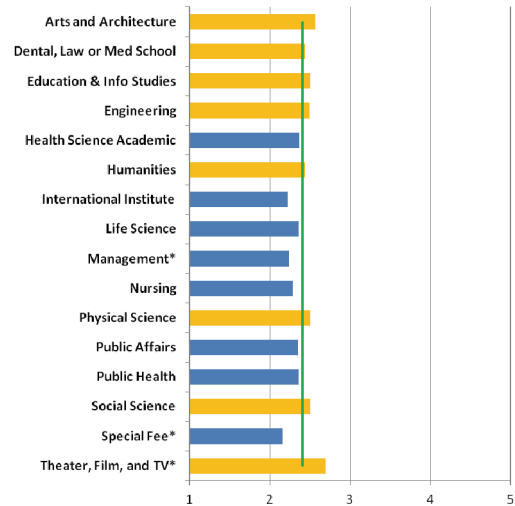
Anxiety (Average = 2.83)



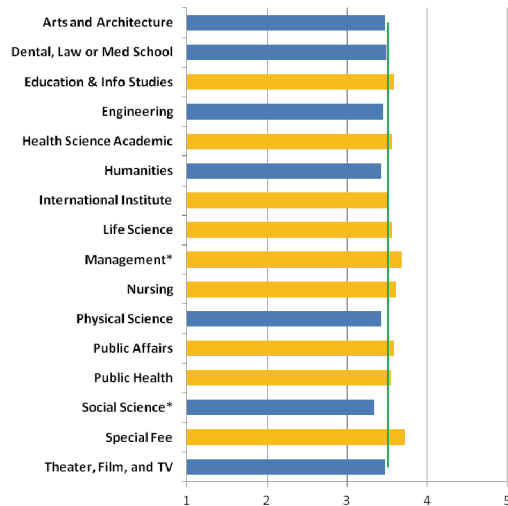
Well-Being (Average = 3.39)



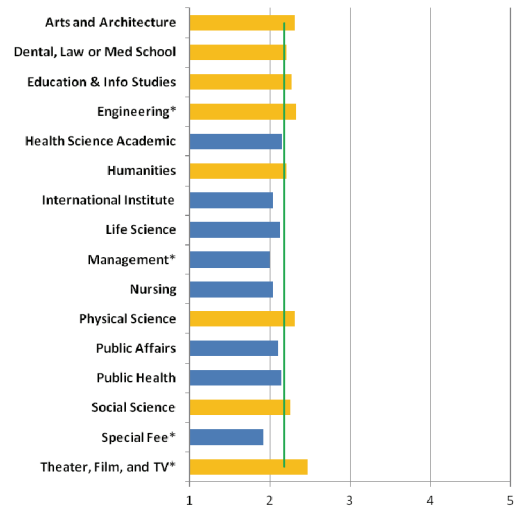
Psychological Distress (Average = 2.41)



Positive Affect (Average = 3.51)



Depression (Average = 2.18)



■ Above Average
 ■ Below Average
 — Average

Appendix

Table A1. Mental Health Scores by Major Field

| Major Field | Positive Affect | Psychological Distress | Well Being | Anxiety | Depression | Mental Health |
|---------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| Arts and Architecture | 3.47 | 2.57 | 3.37 | 2.99 | 2.31 | 3.45 |
| Dental, Law or Med School | 3.49 | 2.44 | 3.38* | 2.89 | 2.21 | 3.56 |
| Education & Info Studies | 3.58 | 2.50 | 3.35* | 2.93 | 2.27 | 3.51 |
| Engineering | 3.45 | 2.49 | 3.21* | 2.78 | 2.32* | 3.49* |
| Health Science Academic | 3.56 | 2.37 | 3.44 | 2.83 | 2.15 | 3.64 |
| Humanities | 3.43 | 2.44 | 3.40* | 2.84 | 2.21 | 3.54 |
| International Institute | 3.52 | 2.22 | 3.42 | 2.50 | 2.03 | 3.72 |
| Life Science | 3.56 | 2.36 | 3.50 | 2.82 | 2.12 | 3.63 |
| Management | 3.68* | 2.24* | 3.51 | 2.71 | 2.00* | 3.75* |
| Nursing | 3.61 | 2.29 | 3.46 | 2.87 | 2.03 | 3.70 |
| Physical Science | 3.43 | 2.50 | 3.21* | 2.82 | 2.31 | 3.49 |
| Public Affairs | 3.58 | 2.35 | 3.45 | 2.80 | 2.10 | 3.65 |
| Public Health | 3.55 | 2.36 | 3.42** | 2.78 | 2.14 | 3.63 |
| Social Science | 3.34* | 2.50 | 3.30 | 2.92 | 2.25 | 3.48 |
| Special Fee | 3.72 | 2.16* | 3.62 | 2.65* | 1.92* | 3.84* |
| Theater, Film, and TV | 3.47 | 2.69* | 3.27 | 3.13* | 2.47* | 3.35* |
| All Students | 3.51 | 2.41 | 3.39 | 2.83 | 2.18 | 3.58 |

* P<0.05

Table A2: Major Field by Fee Structure

| | Professional Fee Programs | Special Fee Programs | Dent, Law, Med | Academic Programs |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Arts and Architecture | | | | 78 |
| Dental, Law or Med School | | | 553 | |
| Education & Info Studies | | | | 238 |
| Engineering | | | | 343 |
| Health Science Academic | | | | 105 |
| Humanities | | | | 180 |
| International Institute | | | | 11 |
| Life Science | | | | 191 |
| Management | 183 | | | 18 |
| Nursing | 72 | | | 11 |
| Physical Science | 0 | | | 187 |
| Public Affairs | 46 | | | 130 |
| Public Health | 115 | | | 85 |
| Social Science | | | | 243 |
| Special Fee | | 164 | | |
| Theater, Film, and TV | 51 | | | 24 |
| Total in the fee program | 467 | 164 | 553 | 1844 |