The Committee for Wellness advocates for initiatives that increase quality of life for graduate students. This year, the Wellness Committee has focused on initiatives that foster wellness, mental health, and diversity and inclusivity.

We seek to compile comprehensive information regarding all of the G12+ school's wellness needs so that institutional knowledge is passed on year-to-year and so that GAPSA is able to develop comprehensive and tailored wellness solutions and advocacy plans.

The Committee for Wellness is particularly concerned with access, retention, equity, diversity, and inclusion of all graduate students.

*This report is a high-level survey-based overview and does not purport to represent all wellness concerns experienced by students at the G12+ Schools*
Wellness At A Glance

12 Graduate Schools
- Professional Students
- Research Students
- Underrepresented and underserved Students

Key Challenges
- Lack of knowledge regarding available campus resources
- Curricular and clinical/labor challenges
- COVID-19 Measures and accommodations

- 33% Graduate Schools with clinic or labor concerns
- 66% Graduate Schools with Online-Learning Concerns
- 75% Graduate Schools with campus resources access concerns
Primary Wellness Challenges

- COVID-19 has prevented lack of connection-making opportunities outside of class. There are small cohort of students, so not a lot of social organization and support. Only one or two students usually seem motivated to connect students with each other. The graduate school is also very isolated from other graduate schools.
- Remote accommodations have been very flexible, but there is still a significant amount of burnout. Students are expected to operate normally in not-normal circumstances.
- Students are generally unaware of campus mental health and wellness resources. Not a wide-reaching influence on students there.
- Standard PhD program for students makes it pretty normal compared to other programs across the country.
- Graduate program wellness survey produced mixed-results regarding students' perceptions of their wellness status.

Themes: Disconnected, information access
There is generally a lack of knowledge surrounding what wellness services exist on campus. This could've especially been prioritized and communicated during more stressful times of the year. While remote access has generally been allowed, some courses have pretty stringent thresholds to be allowed remote access to classes or recordings. People with Green Passes but who have other reasons for not attending in-person have difficulty in being allowed to join remotely. Some professors ask for documentation of a Red Pass. If there are only 1-2 students in need, they sometimes will not even offer a remote option. Professional students within the school are generally at Penn for a shorter duration of time, and therefore have less of an understanding of campus wellness services being offered.

Themes: Information Access, COVID-19
Across the entire school, students are concerned about the way that leadership is treating their mental health concerns. Rather than acknowledging the root issue of demanding schedules, leadership is focusing on the symptoms of poor mental health and recommending that students seek counseling to resolve issues.

Students are generally concerned that leadership pays little mind to their viewpoints and feel that their voices are not being heard when they speak up about issues such as clinical work and coursework challenges.

Even when students attempt to abide by the school's mental health guidelines, they still feel under scrutiny. For example, the school has requirements on what students must do if they need to take a mental health day.

Themes: Leadership Communication, Mental Health, Demanding Schedule
Weitzman School of Design

Primary Wellness Challenges

- Studios are important to experience in person, but the blocks of classes (generally 2-6pm, with many students having other commitments before and after) do not allow for time to eat and rest in between, which leads to short-term and chronic health problems.
- When virtual learning is necessary, professors are unprepared to make this transition, leaving many students having to pull extra work so as to not strand their classmates. Covid-related preparatory materials are not available.
- Students must regularly pay out-of-pocket for models. It is common to spend several hundred dollars on materials, with no way to access funding.
- The school generally lacks interdisciplinary coursework related to cultural competencies, planning for different populations and demographics. Students would like for the program to be more socially and culturally conscious.

Themes: Scheduling, expenses, lack of accommodations
Primary Wellness Challenges

- There are disparate resources for full-time and part-time students.
- During the pandemic, access to recreational activities weren't available. But now, they aren't fully funded because funding was taken away during the pandemic.
- Some people have to go in person for labs and work, limiting what accommodations can be offered to students. No school-wide policies. More resources for students (Ubers, etc.) who need to come in person. Limited course options for masters students with limited spots. Students want more career services assistance (with networking, alumni, resources).
- Student Health Services access to facilities are limited, and appointments are very limited. Students not informed of resources until they need them.
- CAPS wait times and outside referrals that they do are inaccessible.
- Accommodations provided by faculty or department, but not the school, so disparate policies impact people differently.
- Working conditions for SEAS students are poor. Offices with no windows, not organized, crowded spaces, bad working hours, and depressing.
- DRL building and Vagelos building have terrible air conditioning for students. Working in temperatures below living conditions.
- Burnout is definitely an issue. The workload is very heavy. People are persistently tired and overworked and underpaid in classes and in research positions. Need for more breaks and more time to rest for students.
- Large amount of international students that make school logistics (VISA and employment logistics) challenging sometimes. ISS should try to provide more assistance for students.

Themes: Resources inaccessibility, working conditions, disparate accommodations, burnout
Graduate School of Education

Primary Wellness Challenges

- There is a large amount of burnout as it relates to finding jobs and concluding academic programs. Feeling of minimum school support beyond E-mails for transition following graduation.
- Significant COVID-19 burnout and isolation burnout.
- Second semester for most masters students is a lot harder to be motivated and to stay on top of coursework.
- Masters students don't receive enough critical feedback so they don't really have a lot of guidance for other programs and jobs.
- Not really any established zoom/absence accommodations. Professors have said they don't have the technological capabilities to do zoom, or just reluctant to do so. It varies on a case-by-case basis.
- GSE has CAPS administration come in and give talks, generally tries to make it known to GSE students. Some classes have speaker sessions where they come. But other students seem to not know about resources that are available.

Themes: Burnout, feedback, accommodations
Penn Carey Law School

Primary Wellness Challenges

- The school faculty is generally accommodating with missing classes/hybrid attendance, but no school-wide policy regarding mental-health days, absences, or recordings/hybrid learning.
- Students have divergent views about COVID-19 policies, and can raise tensions among students regarding masking.
- Students are generally unaware of campus-wide health and wellness services that are offered. Students know what resources are offered within the law school, but not outside of it.
- Very long exams (sometimes 12+ hours straight) result in students being very stressed during exam period. There are very few accommodations for exams if you are sick or if something comes up.
- Clinic students often feel as though their hours are extremely long, stressful, and variable, resulting in added stress to an already-burdensome workload.
- LLMs feel left out of conversations about COVID-19 policies. Disgruntlement with continued back-and-forth COVID-19 policies.
- LLM students wish that there was one JD-LLM mixer to actually increase social integration of LLM students.

Themes: Accommodations, COVID-19, information access
School of Nursing

Primary Wellness Challenges

• Online learning stressors and Zoom fatigue remain a large concern for Nursing students. Generally faculty has remained accommodating to students' concerns, but there is significant burnout.
• Mental health resource access is limited across the school. Access to CAPS feels restricted to many students, with long wait times for certain students and referrals taking months to process.
• Curricular concerns are prominent, but administration is resistant to change. Clinical hours are long, unpaid, and persist through the entire CRNA program, unlike many other programs.
• Lack of communication among professors, resulting in overlapping course content and needless repetition.

Themes: Online fatigue, CAPS, clinic
Primary Wellness Challenges

- Mental health resources are limited. In-House Medical Schools CAPS Counselor has a 4-6 week wait time. Students can only meet with them 2-3 times before being referred elsewhere.
- Curricular concerns revolve around post-examination lectures the following day(s), mandatory in-person small-group sessions, and certain classes not being accessible via virtual learning platforms. Students have to share sign-in barcodes with each other in order to be "signed in" if they are unable to attend in-person courses.
- Difficulty for research students in finding potential Principal Investigators (PIs). Students are supposed to find a minimum of 5 PIs, but are provided little institutional guidance or support.
- MS3s working in COVID-19 clinics raised potential health and safety concerns, and students are now working to prevent risky assignments moving forward.

Themes: CAPS, post-exam stress, COVID-19
School of Social Policy and Practice

Primary Wellness Challenges

- Lack of communication between students and faculty, and lack of services because of short-staffing at Career Services are primary issues.
  - Lack of career guidance and support while in school.
- Although there has been significant flexibility for remote learning, many lectures are not recorded and are not available on Canvas, resulting in students missing class content.
- In-person practicum courses presented challenges with COVID-19, and some courses exploitative of formerly-incarcerated individuals and others to use as "class projects."
- Recurring issues with clinical hours and transportation to sites not being covered financially.
- Disproportionate amount of evening classes that makes transportation and scheduling difficult.
- Issues with field placement offices and inability to choose preferred sites.

Themes: Curriculum, Career Services, Financing
The class president and student liaisons are expected to mediate issues between students and faculty; these are unpaid roles and the students in them cannot handle the burden, which also creates a wall between students and faculty.

When students need mental health support, CAPS is short staffed and the wait times of the assigned counselor are long following the first intake.

The hybrid format is difficult with large classrooms of 120 students. Technology for Zoom learning is inadequate: there are issues with hearing the instructor and bugs in pre-recorded lectures that were never fixed by IT (made up of unpaid students); yet, the school claims that virtual learning is supported.

The large animal campus is one hour away from the Penn campus, with no options for public transportation, making commuting challenging for some students.

Themes: Liaisons, hybrid format, off-campus commuting
The Wharton School

Primary Wellness Challenges

- MBA students who took part in this survey stated that their students generally do not have super salient wellness needs. WGA puts on various programs.
- MBA students are required to take additional core classes.
- Students generally know about student health, but not much else in terms of campus resources.
- CAPS sending police to students who are having mental health crises
- Need for more mindfulness and recreational activities to support PhD students.
- Feeling constant stress of classes and research makes it feel like you're never fully caught up, never on track, and a general feeling of imposter syndrome.
- Discrepancies among COVID-19 compliance among students and faculty create complexities in protecting students' health. There is no easy solution aside from school-wide policies.
- Generally good accommodations for seminars, but classes tend to vary by faculty-member's opinions on learning options.
- PhD qualification exams, proposals, and other milestones are extremely stressful for students and can impact program funding.

Themes: Information access, CAPS response, curricular management
IDEAL Council

Primary Wellness Challenges

- Excessive exam times for students that have other important commitments that require their attention. Long processes for labs and time commitments. There are accounts of worker abuses in various schools and contexts.
- Penn’s vaccine policy requires mandatory vaccines, but the clinic is not open frequently, and is not accessible. Same thing with masks.
- All-gender restrooms are needed across the board. Every building should be getting one if not already, but retrofitting has been a challenge and time-consuming.
- Lack of institutional support for marginalized students. Lack of knowledge over what resources there are on campus. Graduate programs vary significantly in length, so students who are here longer have more access to resources.
- Adding an additional person within LSA to help graduate students has been rejected by the university.

Themes: Wellness services accessibility, institutional support
Thank you!
2021-2022 GAPSA Wellness Committee
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