**University of Alberta Graduate Students’ Association (GSA) Mental Health Initiatives:**

The U of A GSA has been involved in several important initiatives aimed at promoting mental health for graduate students.

When the U of A received a three-year provincial grant in support of mental health initiatives, the GSA successfully advocated for a psychologist specifically for graduate students to be located in a satellite office in Triffo Hall (the same building that houses the GSA). This is an important service, as some graduate students feel hesitant to go to the main offices of Clinical and Counselling Services as they may run into undergraduate students they help teach or otherwise supervise.

We regularly negotiate with the University for the continued provision of the Graduate Student Assistance Program. Offered through Homewood Health, this service provides additional counseling services to graduate students (beyond what they receive as U of A students and what is offered through the GSA’s Health and Dental Plan). It also provides a range of other services, such as nutritional counseling and access to a fitness trainer, that we see as contributing to mental health.

We are actively engaged in a broad range of mental health focused committees and working groups on campus and in the province.

In the fall of 2015, we secured funding through an Unwind Your Mind grant offered through the Wellness Centre, and hosted a series of Graduate Student Coffee Breaks. We have now obtained this grant for a second time and will offer a mobile version of our Coffee Breaks in fall 2016. Our goal with these events is to reach out to a wide variety of graduate students and offer stress relief and an opportunity for participants to meet people and make friends and connections. Graduate student work can be isolating and the related stress can be difficult to manage; these breaks provide space for graduate students to relax and build peer connections. Likewise, fostering a positive and informal atmosphere in which students can relax and socialize will help them build social and support networks. We believe that stronger social bonds create more resilient and happier students and that support networks are vital to graduate student success and overall wellness. The pressure on graduate students to produce academic results and advance in their programs can be very intense and many will benefit from a break scheduled specifically to step away from their work, de-stress, unwind, and meet a friend. This is especially so if these breaks occur near to their offices or labs and are thus very convenient to attend. We are looking forward to offering these Graduate Student Coffee Breaks in furtherance of the GSA’s vision of a healthy campus as one where every graduate student has a healthy work-life balance and a community to rely on in times of need.

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