



Graduate Student Art Therapy Night: *Stress Relief Through Mindful Creativity*



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GRADUATE STUDENTS

Over **88%** of graduate students across all disciplines at UCLA describe their level of stress as “moderate” or higher. **11.3%** of graduate students describe their stress as “very high” (SAIRO, 2014).

However, less than a third of graduate students (**30.7%**) admit to engaging in relaxation activities such as yoga and meditation and a similarly low proportion of students (**35.7%**) regularly engage in social activities.

Further, over **25%** of graduate students have never or rarely interacted with “people who are different from you”, while the majority of those who have reported the quality of these interactions as positive or very positive (**63.6%**).

How can we help graduate students manage their stress and facilitate community building and social interaction?

METHODS

Through a collaboration with the Graduate Student Resource Center, Queers for Public Health, the UCLA Arts and Healing Center and the Healthy Campus Initiative, the 2-hour guided art therapy event provided:

- Exercises to encourage interaction and team-building
- Guided meditation and mindful awareness
- Open-ended watercolor painting and expression
- Free watercolor paint sets and paper pads

The UCLA Healthy Campus Initiative

Art Therapy Night fulfills the core values of the UCLA Healthy Campus initiative in the following ways:

1. **Fosters High Level Wellness**, by providing a outlet for creativity and stress relief and encouraging the practice of mindful awareness and social interaction.
2. **Encourages Personal Responsibility**, by providing students a portable art kit which they can take home and continue art therapy practices in any setting.
3. **Respects Diversity**, by providing students the opportunity to learn from and interact with others that they may not normally interact with.
4. **Strives to Reduce Inequities in Health**, by communicating themes of community health and wellness in graduate students.
5. **Is Integrative**, by incorporating social team-building exercises, storytelling activities and guided meditation to create an event that not only promotes creativity, but overall wellness.



RESULTS

24 students from a variety of disciplines were in attendance at Graduate Student Art Therapy Night, which was held on April 8th, 2015 in the Student Activities Center.

Within this limited setting, we found that participants experienced a **significant decrease** in perceived stress levels and are hopeful that further development and implementation of an art therapy program will be beneficial in addressing stress-related issues in the graduate student population.

However, the event was held during “Week 2” of the Spring quarter, when students may be less stressed than usual.

- How can we ensure that the stress-relieving benefits produced are sustainable?
- How can students continue to be motivated to practice mindfulness and creativity?

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References:

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