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# A Case for the Empathetic Librarian

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## Abstract

*The health and wellness of its students are integral to a university's success in achieving the mission of cultivating academically and critically engaged students. But surveys of student mental health demonstrate that a significant number of students struggle with issues such as anxiety, stress, and depression. Focusing on the space of librarian-student research consultations, this chapter will explore some of the existing work promoting the ideas of relationship building and emotional connection that demonstrates to students that affective care happens at many different service points throughout the university.*

*Balanced, happy people are more productive, more creative, more collaborative, better at pursuing long-term goals, more likely to find employment, and more physically and psychologically resilient.... Positive emotion is associated with curiosity, interest and synthetic thinking.<sup>1</sup>*

Higher education institutions in the United States strive to cultivate academically and critically engaged students. The health and wellness of its students are integral to a university's success in achieving this type of mission. But surveys of student mental health demonstrate that a significant number of students struggle with issues such as anxiety, stress, and depression. These issues go deeper than time management or stress during finals; these issues affect their well-being and, in turn, their academic engagement and performance. Universities offer an array of services to support student mental and physical health. To take advantage of these services, however, students must be able to recognize and admit they are in need of support. They must proactively seek out help through these services.

Faculty, departmental staff, and librarians are frontline university employees who engage with students on a daily basis. In this position, they may be able to recognize behaviors that signal a student is in need of support. Frontline employees can act as intermediaries between students and services—they can advocate to ensure the university is offering and funding needed services, and they can promote these services and refer students to them. Teaching faculty and librarians are also in a unique position of engaging with students in one-on-one settings such as office hours or research consultations. It is beneficial for them, as university employees, to be aware of specific signals or behaviors indicating students are in need of mental health support and of stigma-reducing techniques for making referrals to appropriate services. Perhaps, too, faculty and librarians can be trained in approaches and skills to create environments in which students feel free to discuss intertwined issues related to academic work and mental health. In these environments, faculty and librarians could engage in active listening and empathy to build relationships that might help mitigate students' feelings of anxiety. Focusing on the space of librarian-student research consultations, this chapter will explore some of the existing work promoting the ideas of relationship building and emotional connection that demonstrates to students that affective care happens at many different service points throughout the university.

## Student Mental Health in Numbers

Data on student wellness demonstrates that students are struggling with a number of issues that may affect their individual growth and academic engagement and achievement. In the spring of 2018, the American College Health Association surveyed 88,178 students from 140 institutions for its *National College Health Assessment II* and found that, though 82.4 percent of college students report their health as “good, very good or excellent,”<sup>2</sup> a significant number of students are negotiating issues that they feel impacted their academic performance over the last year:

- stress (33.2%)
- anxiety (26.5%)
- sleep difficulties (21.8%)
- depression (18.7%)
- cold/flu (16.1%)
- work (15.3%)
- concern for a troubled friend or family member (11.9%)<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, students reported on issues involving physical health, internet use and games, interpersonal difficulties, learning abilities, extracurricular activities, homesickness, drug and alcohol use, sexual assault, discrimination, and eating disorders, though fewer indicated these issues affected their academic performance. The survey went on to state that, according to student reports, in the previous twelve months, 87.4 percent of students felt overwhelmed; 84.3 percent felt exhausted (not from physical activity); 68.7 percent felt very sad; 63.4 percent felt overwhelming anxiety; 62.8 percent felt very lonely; 53.4 percent felt things were hopeless; 42.1 percent felt overwhelming anger; and

41.9 percent felt depressed enough that it was difficult to function. Students also reported that they had seriously considered suicide (12.1%); had inflicted self-injury (7.8%); or had attempted suicide (1.7%).<sup>4</sup>

Serious issues with anxiety and depression also have been reported by other studies focusing specifically on graduate students. A 2014 survey of 790 graduate students at the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley) found that 47 percent of doctoral students and 37 percent of master's students are depressed as measured on a depression scale. The depression scores varied across disciplines, with 64 percent of graduate students in the arts and humanities and 43 to 46 percent of students in the sciences scoring as depressed.<sup>5</sup> Another study, published in 2018 by Teresa M. Evans and colleagues in *Nature Biotechnology*, reported on a survey of 2,279 graduate students that found that they are "more than six times as likely to experience depression and anxiety as compared to the general population."<sup>6</sup> More specifically, 41 percent scored as experiencing moderate to severe anxiety, and 39 percent scored as experiencing moderate to severe depression. The respondents, 90 percent of whom were doctoral students, came from a wide variety of disciplines from universities predominantly in the United States.

Many of the studies, especially those surveying graduate students, examined specific factors that contribute to anxiety, depression, and other wellness issues. The UC Berkeley Graduate Assembly report measured a variety of factors connected to satisfaction with life and depression and developed a list of predictors. The top predictor of student well-being was how students felt about their career prospects. Other predictors included overall health; living conditions; academic engagement in their work; social supports, including social relationships and participation in social groups; financial confidence and concerns; academic progress and preparation; and sleep. The report stated that feeling valued and included in the department and having strong connections to a mentor or advisor were not connected to depression, but were connected to life satisfaction.<sup>7</sup> Virginia Gewin, in her analysis of the issue, added that many graduate students may discover that they have chosen the wrong field, while Evans and colleagues found that issues such as poor work-life balance and advisor or mentor relationships also affect graduate students' wellness.<sup>8</sup>

Students are seeking assistance through the various counseling services offered on campus. The Center for Collegiate Mental Health's *2015 Annual Report* found that the number of students utilizing counseling center services increased by 30 to 40 percent over five years.<sup>9</sup> The *2017 Annual Survey* of the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors (AUCCCD) reported that, of the students who sought help from the 621 reporting counseling centers, 48.2 percent of students were experiencing anxiety; 39.1 percent were experiencing stress; 34.5 percent were experiencing depression; 25.2 percent were dealing with suicidal ideation; 22.9 percent had specific relationship concerns; 21.2 percent had family concerns; 18.8 percent were negotiating interpersonal functioning problems; 15.8 percent were experiencing sleeping problems; and 15.5 percent were experiencing loneliness or social isolation.<sup>10</sup> Students self-reported that access to and use of counseling services does have a positive impact on their academics, with 66.8 percent reporting that the services positively affected their academic performance and 65.2 percent reporting that the services helped with retention. This data is staggering.

The reports also include recommendations on how the university can provide support. The UC Berkeley Graduate Assembly study recommended that the university (1) examine each predictor and ensure the university offers services targeting it; (2) promote strategies to support well-being recommended by the students themselves; (3) make access to these services as hassle-free as possible; and (4) engage students in a dialog on their well-being.<sup>11</sup> Evans and colleagues recommended access to career and professional development programs, which they broadly categorized as mental health support.<sup>12</sup> This recommendation connects to the UC Berkeley findings that career prospects and preparation are important to graduate student mental health. Evans and colleagues also addressed the need for a cultural shift in academic culture on campuses, facilitated by faculty. They suggested that faculty need to be educated on issues that affect the mental health of their students, that they work to eliminate the stigma attached to mental health issues and treatment for those issues, and that they establish a work environment that promotes self-care and a mindful work ethic.<sup>13</sup>

## University Response to Student Mental Health Issues

In *Wellness Issues for Higher Education*, David S. Anderson noted that “institutions of higher education have the growth and development of students as a central part of their missions.”<sup>14</sup> He went on to state that in order for these institutions “to do better with meeting their own objectives and maximize the attainment of their own missions, it is vital that they identify factors that contribute to their climate and their success. Similarly, it is important that institutional leaders identify what detractors or challenges exist to their ultimate attainment.”<sup>15</sup> The findings of the aforementioned studies provide ample evidence of some of the “detractors and challenges” affecting student academic engagement and achievement. With so many students negotiating mental health issues, colleges and universities must constantly reflect on how their services can provide support.

Counseling centers, health services (doctors, but also gyms and mindfulness programs), and career development centers are all common services on traditional campuses these days. At an institutional level, these resources offer appropriate expertise to respond to a variety of issues that affect student mental and physical well-being. Counseling centers are well used and consistently increasing staff to keep up with demand. However, students must be aware of these support services and, more importantly, proactively seek these centers and services out in order to benefit from their offerings and support. Oftentimes though, students may not even realize they need help. They may not notice their own personality or behavior changes signaling that they are in need of additional support.<sup>16</sup> Anderson stated that university employees such as faculty, advisors, and departmental and student affairs staff, among others, who interact with students on a regular basis, “are likely the ones who see students at their best as well as at their lowest or more challenging points.”<sup>17</sup> At an institutional level, university employees working to support the attainment of the institution’s mission share responsibility for promoting student well-being. In their roles as professionals constantly interacting with students, they “are well served to be

acquainted with the issues facing students, and identifying the ways of minimizing the impact of these issues on the lives of students. This doesn't mean making things easier or negating many aspects of the 'real world'; it means that it is appropriate, and in fact, the obligation of college professionals, to connect students with the resources and services that do exist, and to facilitate their engagement with these resources."<sup>18</sup>

In order to facilitate this response, the "focus, then, is one of enhancing the preparedness of these individuals for promoting healthy wellness choices by students, as well as identifying areas of concern and making referrals as appropriate."<sup>19</sup> This by no means suggests that university professionals receive and respond with the sort of in-depth training undertaken by social workers, counselors, psychologists, and other professionals working in the realms of mental and physical health. It does suggest that the university ensure its frontline employees understand the signs that a student might need support, are well aware of university resources available to those students, and are trained to provide referrals in a way that reduces stigma and judgment. Gewin noted that signals to heed include not attending class or doing research; difficulty concentrating; increased irritability; sleep disturbance; and social withdrawal.<sup>20</sup> These sorts of behaviors might indicate a student is in need of support.

## The Role of the Academic Library in Student Mental Health

Many librarians, especially those with liaison or reference responsibilities, are frontline university employees, interacting both with student patrons and with student library employees. As Maurie Caitlin Kelly discussed the role of academic libraries in student retention, she addressed the ways in which the library often plays a central role in the lives of students—it offers a space to study and print, as well as a place where questions can be asked and resources accessed.<sup>21</sup> Librarians offer reference services, research instruction, and individual research consultations, making them quite visible to students. Given the volume and nature of student interactions, how might librarians support student mental health? Are many already engaging in practices that do?

In reference interactions and in research instruction sessions, librarians can promote strategies to reduce feelings of anxiety and stress and endorse university services that support mental health. Due to the central role libraries play in student lives, it is a natural place to disseminate information about university services. Research instruction sessions intend to help students understand the research process, hopefully reducing stress and anxiety around this type of work. However, it is in the individual research consultations where librarians might be able to offer more contextualized support. Individual research consultations, or meetings between a librarian and a student to discuss specific individual research issues, are typically initiated by a student in need of some sort of support—in understanding an assignment or specific academic writing techniques, in developing a research question or search strategy, in identifying key resources. Students may take away more than strategies and processes related to research. In Trina J. Magi and Patricia E. Mardeusz's study of students' takeaways from research consultations at the

University of Vermont, a number of students reported affective benefits such as feeling less overwhelmed, less stressed, and more confident about their research process.<sup>22</sup> Face-to-face interactions proved key—the interactions allowed students to work through their research need in a collaborative process and helped them to feel reassured and inspired. The librarian’s energy proved calming and provided a sense of developing a relationship with someone who is there to offer support.<sup>23</sup>

Veronica Arellano Douglas addressed how students must summon courage to ask for help.<sup>24</sup> She drew from psychologist and scholar Judith V. Jordan, who, along with a group of other scholars, has explored how the concept of connection plays an important part in human growth. Arellano Douglas extracted two pertinent ideas from Jordan’s writings on relational resilience. Jordan stated, “Asking for support directly... is seen as putting the person doing the asking most at risk—we feel most vulnerable when we let people directly know about our need.”<sup>25</sup> Jordan contextualized the difficulty of asking for help by noting that “we live in a cultural milieu that does not respect helpseeking and that tends to scorn the vulnerability implicit in our inevitable need for support. The ethic of individuality and self-sufficiency still takes precedence over an ethic of mutuality.”<sup>26</sup> While Jordan’s analysis applies especially well in thinking about students asking for help negotiating mental health issues in a large or competitive university environment, Arellano Douglas used this framing to recognize the bravery of the students who ask for help in a research consultation. As students talk through ideas, or seek input or feedback, they make themselves vulnerable by admitting they do not know the answer or the process, and they risk judgment for exposing that vulnerability. Arellano Douglas attributed this to their desire for connection.<sup>27</sup>

Academic librarians, especially those who work in roles that require them to work directly with students, engage in much of their work with the intent to help students. Maria Accardi beautifully recounted a story of connecting with a student and noted that she did go into librarianship to be “a helpful, friendly person who could make a difference of some kind in the lives of college students.”<sup>28</sup> The “emphasis on relationships, on actual human beings connecting and seeing each other” was a “meaningful and powerful” reason to take on this work.<sup>29</sup> Kate Adler summarized research consultation interactions concisely: “Stripped of all pretension, what we do involves sitting (literally or metaphorically) with another human being, listening (literally or metaphorically) to another human being.”<sup>30</sup> She believes “research help and affective care work can be interwoven” in support of the learning process.<sup>31</sup> Reference interactions, especially in the format of a research consultation, can be a space where two people connect.

In these examples, librarians and students both acknowledge the importance of connection to facilitate learning. Might this sort of connection help reduce student anxiety beyond the research experience? Is it already impacting student mental health? Could relationships with librarians, as constants throughout the student experience at a university, reduce feelings of social isolation? In thinking about these relationships, Accardi related a powerful line from Professor bell hooks, who called on educators to teach in a way that “respects and cares for the souls of students.”<sup>32</sup> Accardi interpreted this as “aligning the emotionally vulnerable parts of [one]self to the corresponding parts of the patron” in reference interactions.<sup>33</sup> Along the same lines, Arellano Douglas engages students using

Jordan's concept of "mutual empathy," which is "the willingness to be open to growth through connection," and employs Jordan's concept of "supported vulnerability," which is a model of connection that acknowledges that "we all need help and support to grow and be our best selves."<sup>34</sup>

## Historical Context

In 1975, Theodore P. Peck addressed the similarities between reference work and counseling, noting that both types of work include an initial interview to learn more about a patron's needs and a patron's feeling of uncertainty in the process of help seeking.<sup>35</sup> Peck advocated that reference librarians could train in counseling methods and learn techniques such as empathy, which creates an "atmosphere of confidence" between the two participants; attentive behavior, such as eye contact and other nonverbal behavior such as nodding, which can reduce the anxiety of help seeking; and content listening, which creates a rapport between the two participants and allows the librarian to engage in a meaningful dialog with the patron. While he did not apply this to the academic library context, he did consider the patron in a more holistic sense by acknowledging that a librarian can engage in behaviors that put a patron at ease when asking for help. Peck did not go so far as to provide a framework for training, but did recommend that such training be provided in library school.

The librarian-as-counselor was more elaborately addressed by Sara Fine in 1978.<sup>36</sup> Fine discussed the fact that how a librarian responds to a request for help sets the tone for the interaction. She illustrated that librarians can respond directly to the request or ask questions that allow the patron to better articulate their needs. The first interaction might lead the patron to a bookshelf to find their answer, and the latter might allow the patron to feel heard and validated and leave with more accurate answers. In the latter interaction, the "librarian has not 'performed' any therapy, but yet has effectively assumed a counseling function. The difference between counseling as therapy and counseling as an interpersonal function" is key—the former entails years of training, practice, and earning a license; the latter allows librarians to access knowledge from that field to better understand human interactions and relationships to help someone "explore and resolve a problem."<sup>37</sup> Fine stated that individuals can achieve productive capacities for growth when facilitated by accepting, nonjudgmental relationships. Counseling provides this sort of space; it promotes closeness, self-revelation, and authenticity. One person's growth becomes the concern of both participants, and she offers counseling behaviors such as attentiveness, understanding, acceptance, and recognition to support that growth.

Mark J. Thompson, Nathan M. Smith, and Bonnie L. Woods contributed the theory of self-disclosure to the librarian-counselor discussion.<sup>38</sup> This transitions the librarian from an active listener to participating in the dialog, disclosing relevant information that allows the patron to reciprocate with additional information. The hope is that by engaging in an open dialog, the patron will feel more comfortable to express their complete information need. This model foreshadows the more contemporary discussion of mutual empathy and emotional connection.



Are these contributions contrary to a more traditional model of reference practice? Arellano Douglas traced the evolution of reference librarianship through a relational lens. In the early twentieth century, librarians were meant to create hospitable environments, but also act as “guardians of culture and knowledge for the masses.”<sup>39</sup> In the 1970s, reference librarians were encouraged to become invisible and put the patron’s information need at the center.<sup>40</sup> Contemporary conceptions place librarians as “information conduits” transmitting information from a source to the user who needs it. The librarian brings expertise to the transactions and, through the reference interview, guides a patron to information they need to access, all with an affective tone.<sup>41</sup> In these transactions, the librarian is expected to suppress her emotions and focus on those of the patron, or engage in emotional labor.<sup>42</sup> These previous models are one-sided and seemingly distant from the experience of librarians and students connecting and learning together. They are missing an “ethics of care” which “emphasizes that *both* the librarian and patron contribute to the success of the reference interaction.”<sup>43</sup>

## Fully Engaged Practice

To better understand reference practices from the practitioner perspective, Amy VanScoy interviewed academic librarians to understand the “cognitive and affective dimensions” of their reference practice.<sup>44</sup> Her interviews resulted in five themes: the importance of the user; variety and uncertainty; fully engaged practice; emotional connection; and sense of self as a reference professional. A deeper analysis of what she termed a “fully engaged practice” revealed subthemes of effort and persistence, immersion in an individual interaction, and intuition and “reading the user.” This sample of librarians immerse themselves in student interactions, and through empathy or their own intuition, really try to understand where a user is coming from and their specific needs. They deliberately engage in the interaction, “demonstrating a desire to participate intensely and deeply in each individual encounter.”<sup>45</sup> They also demonstrate a commitment to affective care work in the theme of emotional connection. Subthemes such as the “joy of helping” demonstrate their satisfaction in successfully helping users.

Many librarians engaged in reference work likely identify with the results of this study. The practice of fully engaging in a student interaction works to create a space of openness and trust, which can facilitate relationship building. How might future librarians prepare for this sort of engagement with students? VanScoy identified “effective strategies for practice” that emerged from the themes and subthemes: focus on the student’s needs and form sincere relationships with students; be prepared for variety and uncertainty in the work and remain flexible about the outcome of the reference interaction; expend time and effort to engage with each student; manage emotions in the interaction; and reflect on the interactions and the practice as a whole to learn from experience. She offered that both professional development training and the LIS curriculum might prepare librarians to engage in reference as both an intellectual and emotional experience.

## Relational-Cultural Theory and Intersubjective Mutuality

As Arellano Douglas engaged more deeply with the works of Jordan and the other Stone Center scholars, she came to frame reference work through the lens of relational-cultural theory.<sup>46</sup> Developed over the 1980s and 1990s, relational theory responded to the lack of a psychological model that viewed human development and growth through emotional connection. Building on the work of feminist scholars, “Relational Theory grew to encompass the intersections of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and gender to become Relational-Cultural Theory,” which examined how all people “benefit from relationships throughout the lifespan.”<sup>47</sup> Empathy is a central component of creating these connections: “The key to empathy, and what differentiates it from a friendly interpersonal interaction, is deep emotional attunement and genuine understanding. It is an act of mutual recognition that is affirming and intersubjective—recognizing the subjectivities or unique personhood of others.”<sup>48</sup> Connecting back to the work done in reference interactions, Arellano Douglas noted that empathy encompasses many of the techniques employed in reference interviews such as active listening, but stressed that it is “not performative” or neutral, but genuine and “requires a willingness to engage in the affective component of learning, assimilate the patron’s emotions and experiences into your own, and reflect on the overlap and difference between the two.”<sup>49</sup>

The concept of intersubjective mutuality can be defined as the process of sharing empathy between two people. Arellano Douglas summarizes that it is characterized by each person’s:

- interest in and awareness of the other as a unique, whole person;
- emotional attunement through empathy;
- vulnerability through selected self-disclosure;
- acknowledgement, but not imposition of personal needs;
- commitment to enhancing the growth of the other; and
- openness to change through the relationship.<sup>50</sup>

The participants must engage in “relational authenticity, which encourages helping professionals to shed the pretense of neutral, objective authority in favor of selectively sharing feelings, experiences, and imperfections.”<sup>51</sup>

Applying these concepts in the space of an individual research consultation can lead to powerful learning in which two people are connected and growing together. The librarian is taken out of an authority role, and two participants can create a space to co-learn. Participating in intersubjective mutuality “is a powerful way to foster personal, emotional, and

intellectual growth.”<sup>52</sup> The relationships that develop as a result may then offer students a form of affective care that supports their well-being.

## Sentipensante Pedagogy

Carrie Forbes and Jennifer Bowers explored the teaching and learning philosopher Laura I. Rendón’s sentipensante pedagogy as a methodology to employ in research consultations.<sup>53</sup> Sentipensante pedagogy “emphasizes the complementary relationship between the *sentir* of intuition and the *pensar* of intellect and scholarship.”<sup>54</sup> It offers a “holistic methodology . . . to address the needs of the whole-person, thereby balancing the external academic realm and the internal personal realm.”<sup>55</sup> Sentipensante pedagogy offers seven “agreements” to frame this method of interaction: (1) work with diverse ways of knowing; (2) embrace connectedness, collaboration, and transdisciplinarity; (3) engage diverse learning strategies; (4) be open and flexible about being grounded in knowing and not knowing; (5) respect diverse cultures and multiculturalism; (6) balance our personal and professional lives; and (7) take time for self-reflexivity.<sup>56</sup> While this framework is broadly applicable to the learning environment in higher education, many of the agreements can be applied in the more intimate environments of a research consultation. Forbes and Bowers reimaged consultations “to address not only the intellectual needs of students, but also their social, emotional, and spiritual growth. In order to transform our pedagogy to a more holistic practice, librarians need to understand that the intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual are not separate and distinct, but are intertwined, interdependent, and mutually influential.”<sup>57</sup> Similar to Arellano Douglas’s discussion of the role intersubjective mutuality can play in relationship building between librarians and students, the framework of sentipensante pedagogy offers strategies to build that foundation as well.

## Words of Caution

These various frameworks that explore building librarian-student relationships and developing emotional connections to support learning and student well-being do not condone the librarian engaging in what Fine called counseling as therapy.<sup>58</sup> Accardi’s reasons for becoming an academic librarian are likely shared by many librarians—they wanted to genuinely participate in facilitating student intellectual and intertwined emotional growth. Creating a space of mutual empathy and emotional connection does not mean one shares everything. Arellano Douglas responded to critics of this level of librarian-student engagement by noting that librarians can *selectively* share experiences or feelings. Drawing from Accardi, she continued, “Boundaries protect the helper and allow her to maintain a certain sense of authority and power in a world where her position might be undervalued.”<sup>59</sup>

VanScoy mentioned that the passion and commitment of a fully engaged practice may result from librarians feeling their job is a “calling.”<sup>60</sup> Fobazi Ettarh challenged this idea as she discussed the concept of vocational awe, or “the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that results in beliefs that libraries as institutions are inherently good and sacred.”<sup>61</sup> She reminded us that burnout, a “prolonged

exposure to workplace stressors that often drain an employee's vitality and enthusiasm,"<sup>62</sup> is an issue within the profession. If librarians feel that they are responsible for student mental health instead of participants in mutual empathy, that might become a serious stressor. She also addressed the idea of "job creep," or the expansion of duties that goes unrecognized by employers.<sup>63</sup> If librarians invest more time in one-on-one consultations, they do not necessarily experience a reduced workload to accommodate that. Much of the work done in reference and research consultations, especially the affective care work, is never included in job descriptions or annual reviews, so participation in this type of work is defined by the librarian who chooses to engage in it. Discussions of gendered or invisible labor abound and are applicable to the profession at large, not just in the context of relationship building to promote student well-being.

## Training

In addressing how to integrate these various practices into reference work, most authors discuss the role of training or professional development. Forbes and Bowers noted that development of "affective abilities is an ongoing process."<sup>64</sup> Stepping back to the institutional level, Evans and colleagues proposed a "train-the-trainer" model, in which mental health professionals train faculty and other frontline employees to identify mental health needs and provide appropriate guidance and referrals. This model could also be used by career development professionals to strengthen faculty skills in advising and mentorship.<sup>65</sup> The UC Berkeley report even went so far as to say mentorship should be considered in decisions for promotion and tenure.<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusions

Many of the recommendations posed in the UC Berkeley report and the articles by Evans and colleagues and Gewin are the responsibility of the institution. Universities need to ensure they offer services (and sufficient funding) to support issues that affect student well-being. Career centers, mental and physical health services, academic advising and student affairs services all work to support student health so that students can actively engage in their intellectual growth. In their classrooms or in their departments, faculty and departmental staff can initiate dialogs about mental health to help reduce the stigma of mental illness or asking for help. In their courses and labs or on their research project teams, they can facilitate an environment that promotes work-life balance and self-care, and they can provide students with clear expectations and scaffolding to meet those expectations. As mentors and advisors, faculty, too, can offer guidance or referrals and ensure that students feel heard.

Kelly reminded us that "libraries, by function, are an integral part of the college experience."<sup>67</sup> Whether librarians choose to emotionally connect with students is up to them. Arellano Douglas noted, "In 'helping' professions such as psychology, social work, and education, empathy is critical to engaging with clients and students. It validates and reaffirms their sense of self and provides a safe space for them to be honest and authentic."<sup>68</sup>

By participating in mutual empathy, students who seek help from a librarian, who make themselves vulnerable when asking for help, might find an unexpected space where they receive a bit of affective care. And perhaps that will promote a greater sense of well-being. As Arellano Douglas reminded us, “We all need help and support to grow and be our best selves.”<sup>69</sup>

## Notes

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