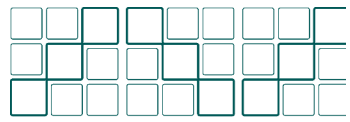

Building a Resilient and Caring Trainee Community at NIH

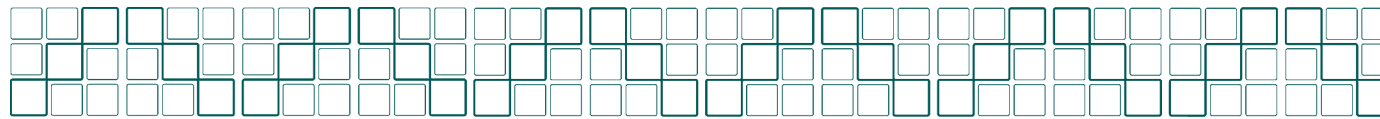
Sharon L. Milgram, Director NIH OITE
milgrams@od.nih.gov
www.training.nih.gov
@NIH_OITE on Twitter





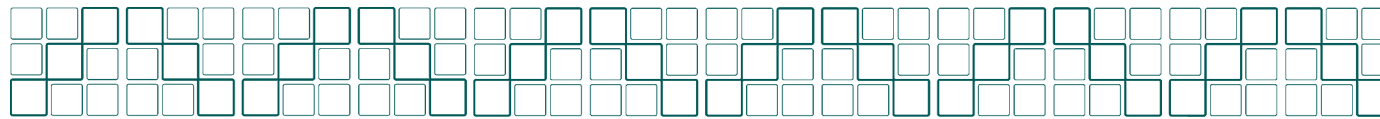


Leaping into the void
Yves Klein, 1960



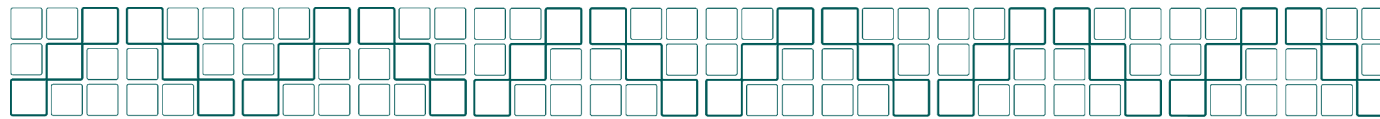
We Train Thresholders

- Emerging Adult (18-25):
 - Establishing independence – personal and economic
 - Redefinition of self and identity exploration – love and work
 - Instability and self focus
 - Feeling in-between
- Early Adult (20-35)
 - Dreams and goals
 - Maintenance of responsibilities and a stable life pattern
 - Work
 - Intimate relationship(s)
 - Friendship circle
 - Parenthood



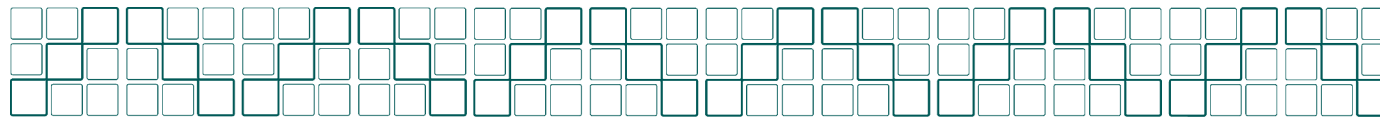
Who May Be Dealing With Multiple Complicating Contextual Factors

- Financial strain, including food and housing insecurity
- Extent of support network
- Extent of family challenges/problems
- Immigrant status/International background
- Membership in marginalized community(ies)
- 1st generation college/graduate student
- Former (or current) trauma
- [Chronic] illness including emotional/mental health concerns
- Culture/atmosphere of program/lab
- News events, both nationally and internationally



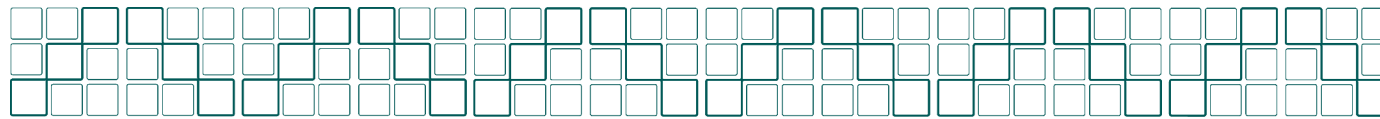
So....

- Of course our trainees are stressed....
and so are we....
and so are the PIs....
and so are other lab staff....
and so is the system itself....



Three Overlapping Goals

- To help trainees appreciate the link between stress management/wellness behaviors and school/work/career/life ‘success’
- To help trainees work through acute stressors with minimal disruption of their academic and research progress
- To better prepare ourselves to deal with more serious mental health concerns that impact some members of our community
- This will require two things:
 - That we frame this as a wellness not an illness issue
 - substantial culture change – of ourselves, the trainees, PIs, and other research staff



A Moment of Self-Reflection and Sharing

- What is your wellness practice?
- What elements are you proud of?
- What are you not so proud of?
- What do you wish you could change?
- Why can't you [or won't you] change it?

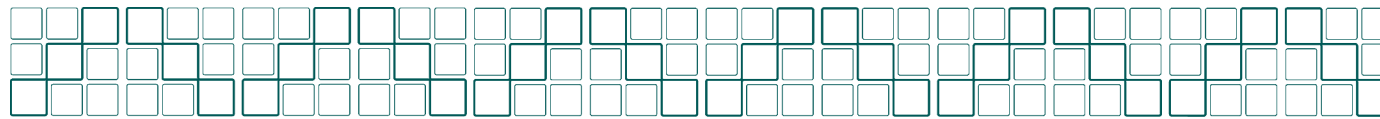


Changing the Culture At NIH

The OITE mission is to provide NIH trainees with resources, support and encouragement to proactively shape their educational and career experiences while contributing to the biomedical research and/or healthcare enterprises.

This requires a holistic approach including substantial **community building** and training focused on **emotional intelligence, resilience, and wellness**. This information is required for:

- ❑ Current educational/training success
- ❑ Attainment of future career goals
- ❑ Ongoing health and wellbeing
- ❑ Engagement in the rest of life



For Culture Change to Happen We Need To

- Learn from experts in psychology, wellness, adult learning, emerging adult development, etc.
- Work toward change at every level
 - Trainees
 - Trainees who are also mentors
 - PIs and other lab staff who interact with and supervise trainees
 - Administrators and policy deciders
- Embed the material into the broader discussion of research and career success
- Ignore the naysayers and skeptics – there will always be some and they can suck the life out of any important initiative



What I Mean When I Say Embedded Into the Broader Discussion

- Two examples from recent workshops
 - “Planning for Career Satisfaction and Success”, a career planning workshop for grad students and postdocs (SLIDE A)
 - ”Almost Everything You need to Know To Get Into Graduate School”, a workshop for summer interns and postbacs preparing to apply to graduate school (SLIDE B)

Career Readiness

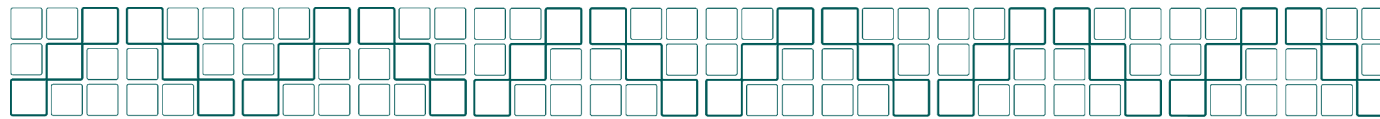
■ Knowing how to:

- ❑ Explore our career options
- ❑ Get the education we need to pursue careers that interest us
- ❑ Find work and volunteer opportunities that help us “try on” a career and gain credentials to “have” that career
- ❑ Prepare professional communication and job documents relevant to the career planning and job search process
- ❑ Interview successfully
- ❑ Be self-aware and grow in the job(s) we choose

- ❑ Identify family, school and cultural messages that impact our career decision-making (often inappropriately)
- ❑ Develop resilience and a sense of self that allows us to thrive through the process

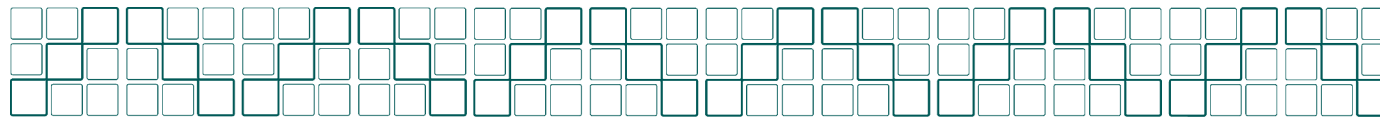
A Universal Truth

- Applying to graduate school is a stressful process
 - Competitive with high stakes
 - Lots going on – [GRE prep], applications, interviews, work and life
 - For some, a time to face past performance and circumstances that can impact admissions
 - A difficult decision-making process
- Students who succeed manage the process AND the stress of the process
 - Use OITE (and other) resources to make a plan and follow it
 - Take our up-coming wellness and resilience workshops
 - Come to drop-in meditation (every T, Th)
 - Reach out to important people in your life
 - Participate in Wellness Wednesday and our Resilience Discussion groups



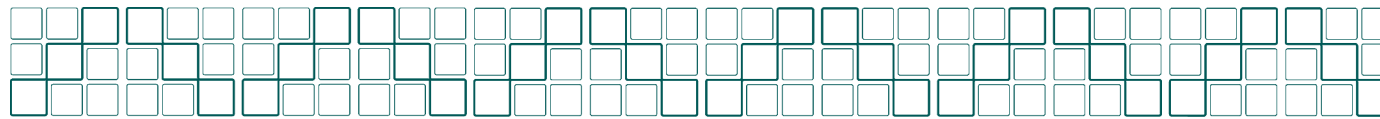
What We Are Doing (I)

- Formal group activities
 - Workshops on assertiveness, wellness and resilience
 - Embedding similar material into orientation programs
 - Highlighting wellness and resilience at large events



OITE Resilience Workshop

- Knowledge, behaviors and attitudes with goal of building a “resilience toolkit”; topics covered:
 - Fostering a growth mind-set
 - Negative self-talk, imposter fears and cognitive distortions
 - Holistic self-care (brief intro followed by in-depth workshop)
 - Shame and shame resilience (sometimes)
 - Staying open to feedback [now a stand-alone workshop]
- Multiple micro-messages:
 - Resilient people prepare to be resilient
 - Resilience = people + process
 - We need to find ways to RESPOND and not to REACT (usually!)
 - We have a choice
 - To do well, we have to be well
 - Do we want to be a jackal or giraffe?



OITE Wellness Workshop

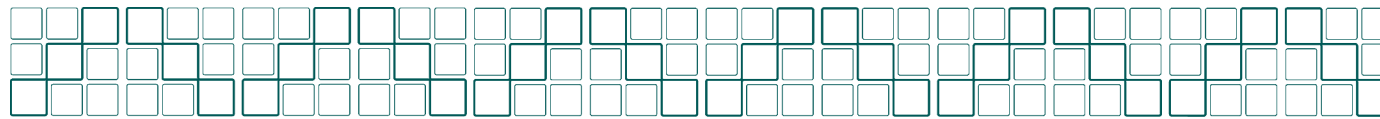
- Based on a 4-quadrant model for wellness
 - Physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health
- Components
 - Discussion of the short-term and Long-term Impact of Stress
 - The benefits of mindfulness
 - Resilience (in more depth in stand-alone workshop)
 - Cultivating Self-Compassion
 - Holistic Health & Self-Care
- Includes two important exercises
 - A Self-Care Assessment & Self-Care Plan
 - A 5 minute Mindfulness Meditation



What We Are Doing (I)

- Formal group activities
 - Workshops on assertiveness, wellness and resilience
 - Embedding similar material into orientation programs
 - Highlighting wellness at major events
 - Making wellness an integral part of the career planning process
- Less formal group activities
 - Weekly drop-in meditation groups
 - Resilience Discussion Groups
 - Wellness Wednesdays
 - Monthly wellness/community building events
 - Support for affinity group activities and brown bag lunches

NOTE – We see both formal \rightleftharpoons informal



OITE Drop-In Mindfulness Meditation Group

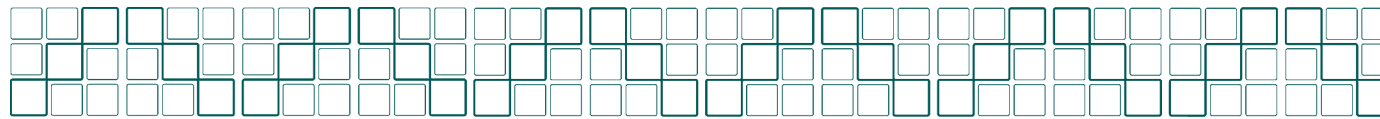
- 30-minute group meeting
 - 5-10 minutes teaching
 - 20-25 minutes meditation
- Rotating focus/themes with handouts each week:
 - Body (e.g., body scan, body-mind relaxation, balanced energy)
 - Breath (e.g., breath awareness, calming breath, breath counting)
 - Reflection/Attributes (e.g., expectations, cultivating inner peace, taking in the good, compassion, playfulness, noticing & welcoming)
- Lots of regulars mixed with curious drop-ins

NOTE -- This is a very popular activity. We are happy to share handouts from our various themes.



OITE Resilience Discussion Groups

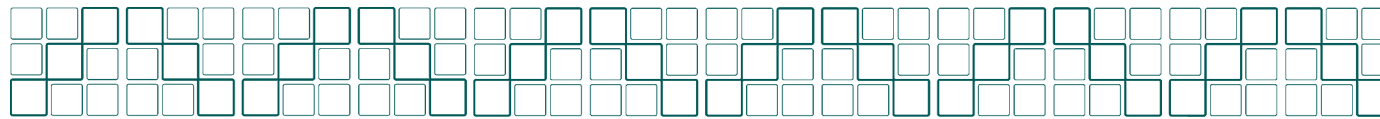
- Usually drop-in but we have a few intact groups
- Facilitated by a therapist with significant knowledge of NIH and research environment
- Popular topics
 - Job search stress
 - Difficult conversations
 - PI and lab group challenges
 - Imposter fears, assertiveness and self-confidence
 - Application anxiety/career decision making stress
 - For trainees:
 - Navigating NIH and life while dealing with emotional or psychological challenges
 - Who are also care-givers
 - Who are living with chronic illness and disability
 - Who are international
 - Coming in the Fall: Who are LGBTQ+; Who are People of Color



Why Facilitated and Not Peer Driven

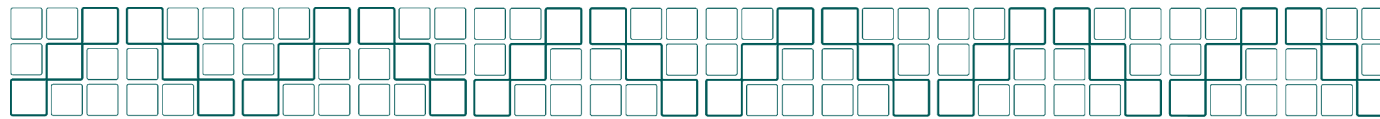
- The facilitator is skilled in....
 - discussing confidentiality and creating a safe, supportive environment
 - making sure everyone has a chance to speak while respecting and working with individual differences
 - summarizing, validating emotions, and generalizing information
 - making referrals when needed
 - reporting back to me about general issues I need to address or things I need to know

NOTE: Trainees engage in 4 modes – **required**, preventative, acute need, maintenance after a major stressor



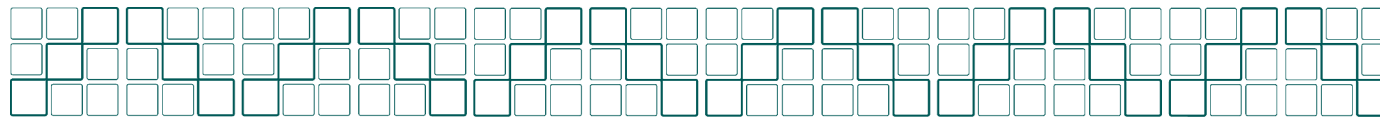
Wellness Wednesday

- A lunchtime discussion focused on an element of physical, mental, emotional or spiritual health
- Some are lead by one of our wellness advisor; some by OITE staff or trainees (with input from an advisor)
- First of the month is always the self-care assessment and self-care plan
- Recent popular sessions
 - Establishing a journaling practice
 - Establishing a meditation practice
 - Finding (or holding onto) a hobby
 - Healthy eating on a budget
 - Art as a wellness strategy
 - Exploring our spirituality
 - Exploring our inner critic, self-talk and cognitive distortions



Monthly Wellness Events

- To practice and model wellness, unity, appreciation for diversity, and resilience
- Some examples
 - Celebrating our culture(s); sharing stories of holidays, special foods, and customs
 - Expressing gratitude; writing thank-you messages for mentors, colleagues, friends, etc
 - Get Moving; Zumba, basketball, putt-putt
 - Get Cool – Get Connected; the OITE "I Am..." campaign
 - Think, Ink, and Network; expressing our individuality and commonality with temporary science tattoos
 - Trainee Unity Day
 - Wellness scavenger hunt and challenge

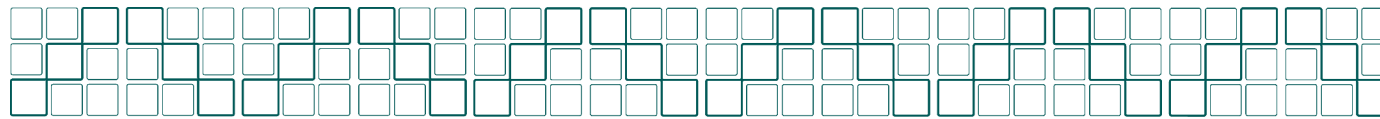


What We Are Doing (II)

■ Individual activities

- Asking/sharing about wellness when talking with trainees (100% of the time)
- Offering wellness advising (self-referral, referral from friends and staff)
- Asking about and discussing counseling, providing referrals and addressing concerns (stigma, privacy, monetary, specific language and/or identity needs, about getting the most out of it)

NOTE: For me, finding someone happy to make referrals based on the specific situation has made a huge impact



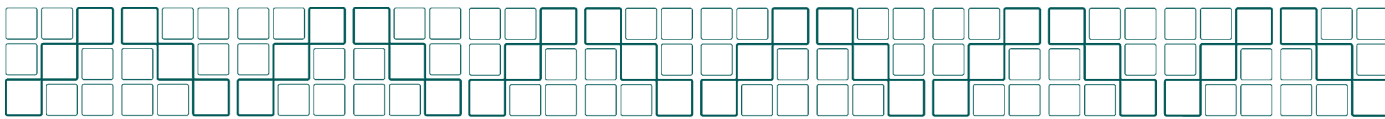
Wellness Advising

- Wellness advisors are trained professionals
- Short- and long-term (in aliquots of 8)
- Trainees self-refer and are referred by peers, PIs, OITE and other NIH staff
- Most common topics discussed:
 - Career decision-making stress
 - Relationships (at work and at home)
 - Identity and sense of self
 - Test and performance anxiety
 - Impact of trauma
- This is NOT therapy
 - BUT many fellows who seek out wellness advising, eventually ask for a referral and most follow through
 - An excellent way to help trainees work through stigma and cultural barriers to counseling



PIs Are More Engaged In the Process

- Resilience and wellness is now embedded into the training we offer tenure-track investigators at NIH (from both sides)
 - The PIs do the same 4-quadrant wellness assessment that we do with trainees
- PIs who hear us speak (about wellness, leadership or about our services) are significantly more likely to reach out.



Hi Sharon,

Thank you for your advice and coaching.

I organized my conversation based on your suggestions and

I discussed today with [REDACTED] how stress is affecting the way he interacts with people, and as a consequence, the working environment in the lab. I organized the conversation based on your suggestions and I think it was productive. He realizes that he is under lots of stress, and that some of his interactions with others were not correct. He will follow up with you, and he is open to work with OITE to develop skills to deal with stress.

Thank you so much,

[REDACTED]

I encourage PIs to describe what they have observed, express their concern as part of making the referral

Maybe the most important thing I've learned from ~~the~~ you is the OITE as a whole is how to ask for help. Resources are available, but reaching out has always been hard for me. Learning how, and witnessing how impactful it has been in my life will no doubt serve me well in ~~the~~ ^{my} future endeavors.

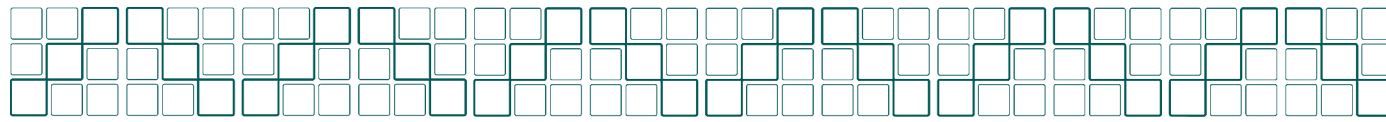
Thank you so much, and I wish the best for you and your family.
Graciousness and Love,

[REDACTED]



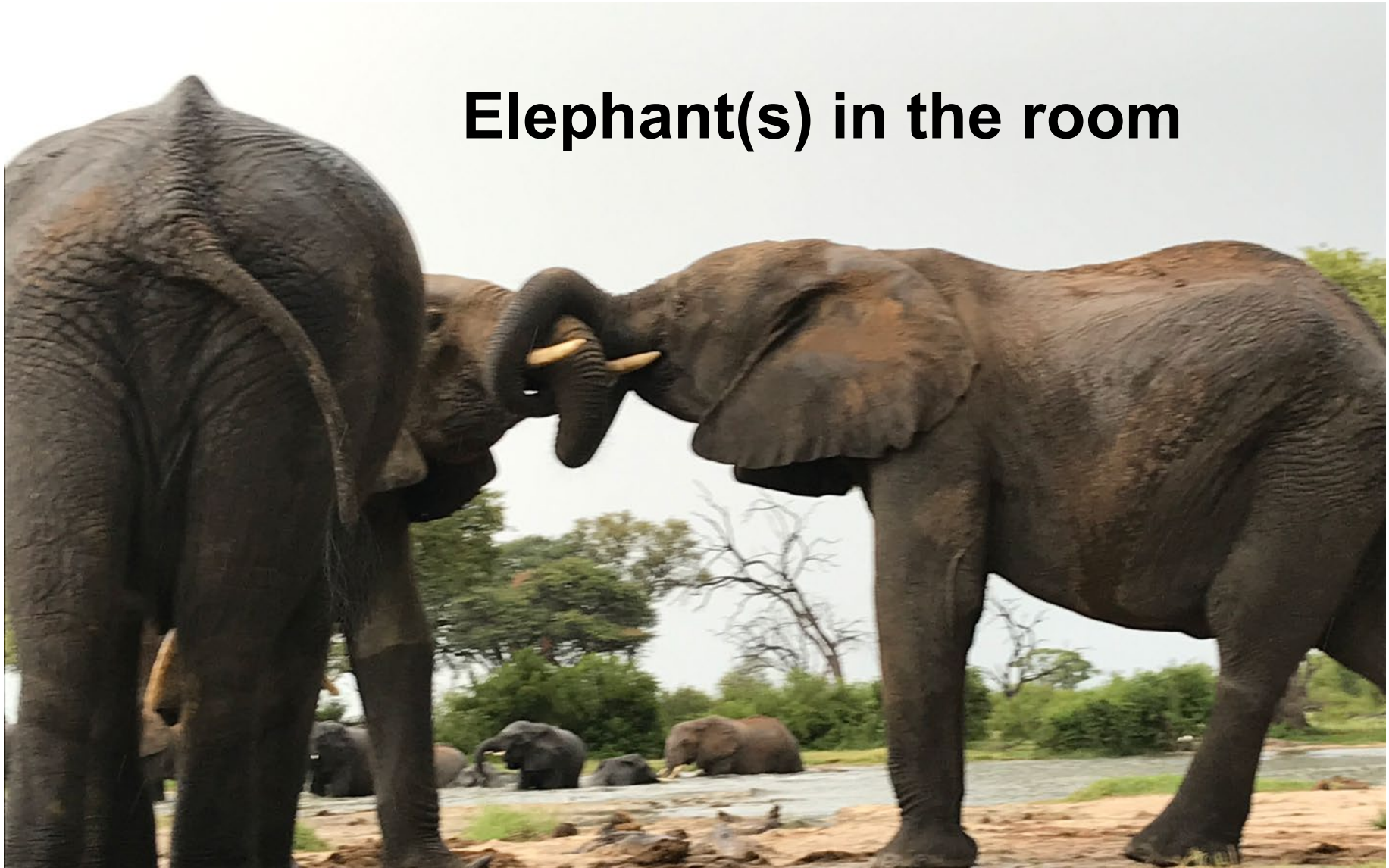
Why We Are Making Progress

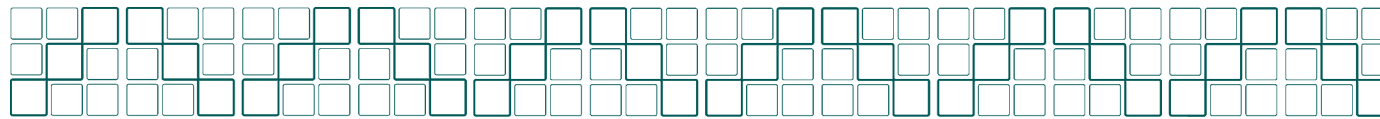
- Trainees hear these messages **again and again**, from many different people and in many different contexts.
- There are multiple entry points and trainees can choose what makes sense for them.
- Wellness staff are integrated into the OITE Career Center to break down barriers for reaching out.
- OITE staff buy-in to the concepts and are not just passive observers.
- We use a lot of active learning makes this more fun and personal.
- I use my social capital and institutionally-derived power to get students to participate.
- I take time to address the....



Now Let's Talk About the.....

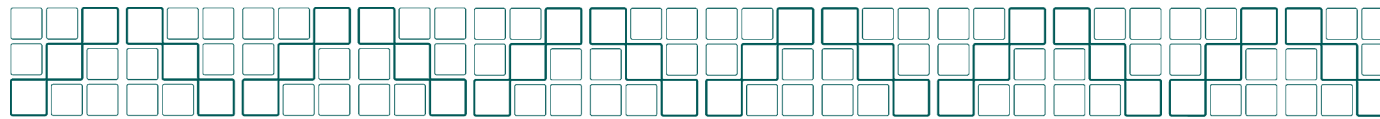
Elephant(s) in the room





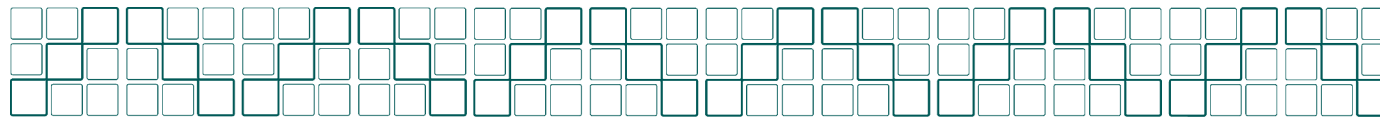
Active Learning

- Beyond lecturing, we try to engage the students in using the material, in class and beyond
- Ways that have worked for me
 - Journaling
 - Informational interviews with people they respect about their wellness strategies, approach to set-back, etc
 - Asking the students to role play or develop a short skit highlighting material (example on next slide)



Active Learning

- <https://youtu.be/PHN5VbQMYfE>
- Video contains short presentations from student groups
 1. Imposter Fears
 2. Growth Mindset
 3. Cognitive Distortions

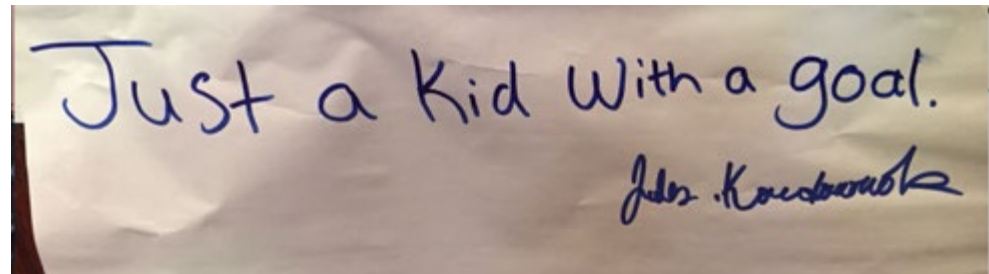


Fun Ways To Engage Students

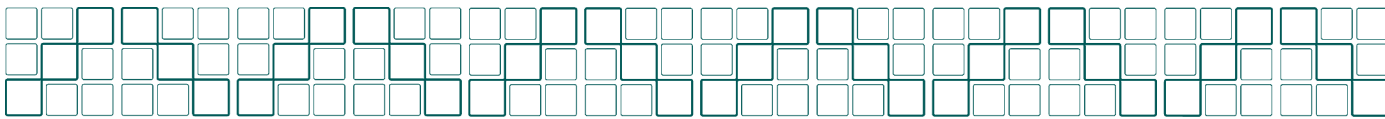
- Three Good Things
- A wellness collage
- The Six Word Memoir
- Art that 'Talks' to Me
- Wellness informational interviews

Listened to an orchestra play while I ate my lunch
Security guard remembered me from previous day
Made a meal that reminded me of my mom's cooking

understood every other 3 words from PI
Got to attend my first museum in DC
Got closer with NAEP peeps



I was drawn to it because of its large size depicting a confident woman of color. All throughout college I never saw one photo/ painting up on the halls of any women of color only white men.

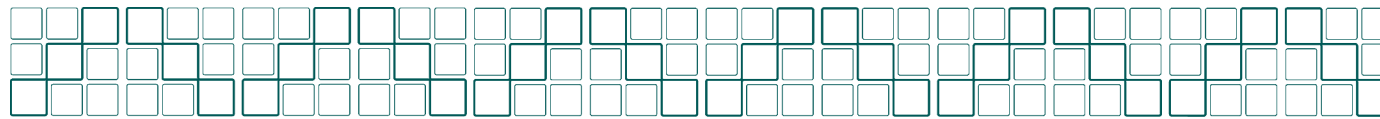


Wellness Collage



A Few Random Thoughts To Wrap Up

- Go back to my question about your wellness – if we want our students to be well, we have to be well.
- We need in-depth training on the impact of trauma on student learning in high stress environments.
- We need to change cultural views around drinking as a wellness strategy and cell phones as a replacement for human interaction.
- The earlier students come forward, the more we can help them construct the scaffolding they need to succeed – we need to make this easier for them.
 - This is especially important for students with prior/current [mental] health concerns.
- Faculty want and need wellness resources too.



Final Take Home

- Up-coming training opportunities
 - I will be at ABRCMS with two wellness staff for a pre-meeting workshop on this topic
 - NIH T3 will happen again, July 20-21, 2020
 - We are developing a wellness webinar series for trainers, mentors, and program administrators



Acknowledgements

- NIH trainees who share their stories, frustrations and dreams with me
- AAMC GREAT group for their enthusiasm, interest and willingness to collaborate on the NIH Train-the-Trainer event (coming again in 2020)
- OITE staff and especially our wellness advisors and career counselors
- Many colleagues who contributed to my learning
 - Hile Rutledge, OKA and Associates
 - Robbye Fox, Parent Encouragement Program
 - Annie Scheiner and Jonah Green (and the many therapists from JGA who advise me and who work with our fellows)