

Dogs, Stress, and Tests, Oh My!

A Wellness Program for Students Taking a High Stakes Test



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Learning Objectives

1. Describe a wellness program implemented for students taking a high stakes test.
2. Discuss research on the effectiveness of interacting with a certified therapy dog on student stress and anxiety during high stakes testing.
3. Identify practical strategies to implement animal assisted intervention on college campuses
4. Identify at least three considerations (e.g. animal and human welfare, selecting appropriate animals for programs, etc.) that must be addressed prior to incorporating therapy dogs in outreach programming.

Tailoring the presentation...

What brought you to this presentation?

Animal Assisted Interventions: A Growing Trend

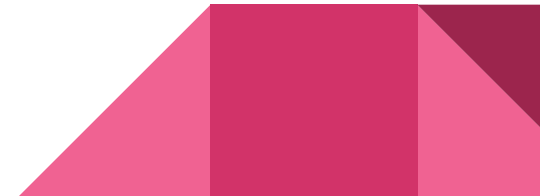
- Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) are growing in popularity and practice.
- AAI has many applications, two of the most common on college campuses are therapeutic outreach or as part of individual therapy.
- AAI has grown in popularity for its low cost, and its ability to reach a large number of people while requiring few resources.



Stormy at Therapy
Dog Extravaganza!
Finals Week at WCU

In a study of the
prevalence of AAI
programs, **62% of**
surveyed colleges
had current stress
relief programs using
animals (Haggerty &
Kiely Mueller, 2017).

The Problem...

- Elevated perceived stress prior to high stakes tests is associated with (Austin et al., 2010):
 - lower predicted grades
 - feelings of being less prepared for exams
 - a negative view of courses completed
 - Test performance can be influenced by excess negative feelings that are common among stress-induced college students (Adams et al., 2017):
 - Homesickness/friendsickness
 - sleep deprivation,
 - Feeling overwhelmed,
 - depression and anxiety
- 

Supporting Evidence for AAI Programs

- Animals, primarily therapy dogs, have been used on college campuses to address stress, loneliness, and anxiety, often through outreach programs on campus (Gladding, 2016).
 - Interacting with a therapy animal can lower anxiety and loneliness
 - that these types of outreach programs can be a way to assist students on campus whose needs may not warrant ongoing counseling, but could benefit from programs aimed at reducing stress and anxiety.

Does it work?

Pendry et al. (2018) conducted a randomized controlled trial to evaluate the effects of a AAI intervention to reduce college students' stress the week before final exams.

Experimental Group: 10 minutes of interacting with dogs and cats.

Control Group: watched a 10 minute slideshow of the dogs and cats.

Waitlist Group: wait list group- assessed while waiting 10 minutes for their turn to interact with the dogs and cats.

Outcome: experimental group had significantly **higher levels of contentment and lower levels of irritability and anxiety** compared to both other groups.

Does it Work?

Ward-Griffin et al. (2018) studied the effect of a pre-exam therapy dog drop-in event on student well-being. This study added a delayed post-test adding the variable of time.

Experimental Group: completed questionnaire immediately before/after interacting with therapy dogs, and again 10 hours later.

Delayed Treatment Control Group: completed all the baseline measures and the 10 hour follow-up measures.

Outcome: Therapy dog sessions had strong immediate benefits. Experimental group had significant:

- Stress reduction
- Increased happiness and energy levels, and
- Greater improvement in negative affect, perceived social support, and perceived stress than the delayed treatment control group

Purposes of the WCU program:

1. Ease student stress and anxiety prior to taking their comprehensive exam, a high stakes test.
2. Introduce CITs to the benefits of AAI through an AAI outreach program.



Marketing The Program



Attention Counselor Education Students:
WANT TO MAKE TEST TAKING A
LITTLE EASIER?

**COME TO THE PRE-CPCE
WELLNESS ROOM TO DE-STRESS
BEFORE THE TEST!**

MEET THERAPY DOG STORMY!

SELF-CARE, STRESS RELIEF TOOLS,
REFRESHMENTS AND MORE!

10-11AM

ATTENTION STUDENTS TAKING CPCE:

**COME TO THE PRE-CPCE
WELLNESS ROOM TO DE-STRESS
BEFORE THE TEST!**

Meet Therapy Dog Stormy!



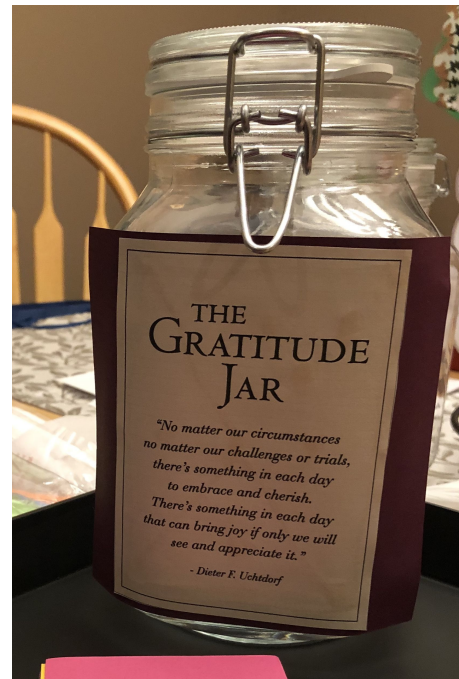
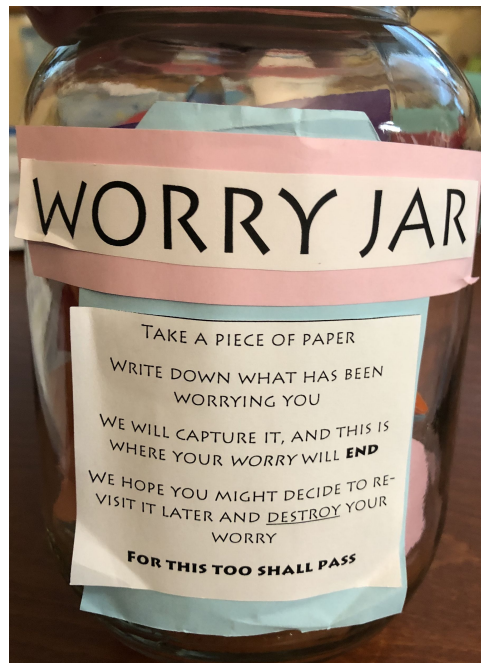
SELF-CARE, STRESS RELIEF TOOLS, AND MORE!

***REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED BY CHI SIGMA IOTA**

9:30-10:30AM NOVEMBER 1ST @ EWINGER OFFICE ANNEX, ROOM 101
*LOCATED IN THE CENTER FOR CONTEMPLATIVE STUDIES ON CHURCH ST.
ACROSS FROM ANDERSON HALL AND ATTACHED TO HOLLINGER FIELD
HOUSE.

Resources in the Room

- Sign-in sheet
- Therapy dogs
- Volunteers, always have at least one person who has already taken the test
- Fidget toys, stress balls, fidget spinners, meditation balls
- Coloring supplies and mindfulness coloring pages
- Inspirational quotes
- Snacks
- Worry Jar
- Gratitude Jar



Resource Examples



Chinese Meditation Balls



Stress balls



Mindfulness Coloring Tools



Paisley, Stormy,
and Students at
the event!

Evaluating the Program

- The first business day following the exam, students are sent a survey about their experience, it takes less than 5 minutes to answer.

Survey Questions:

- Demographic information
- Why they chose to attend the event (or not)?
- Rating of their stress level before entering the wellness space and after leaving it (scale of 1= not stressed to 5 = extremely stressed)
- What tools in the wellness space did you use (check all that apply)?
- Rank order of the helpfulness of the tools in the wellness space
- Did you find it helpful there was a wellness event before the exam?
- Was the event advertised effectively
- Open ended questions
 - Why did you choose to attend this event?
 - What effect did participating in the wellness event have on you?
 - If you interacted with a therapy dog, please tell us about your experience.
 - Suggestions for future events

Event Details

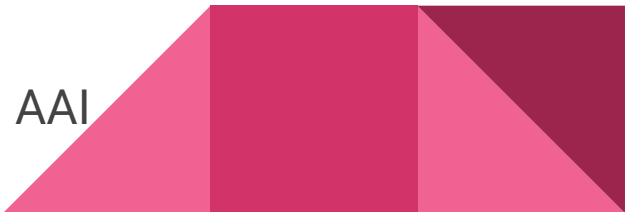
Budget = \$30

Fall 2018 - first time offered, no IRB, no data

Spring 2019 - first survey and much larger group, 3 dogs, 4 volunteers, including an alum who had taken the test to graduate the semester prior

Fall 2019 - exam moved to Main Campus, we were in a separate building, major storm night before closed roads and took out power

Factors that influence success

- Collaborating with CSI: volunteers, snacks, etc.
 - Word of mouth
 - Committed group of volunteers who are interested in AAI
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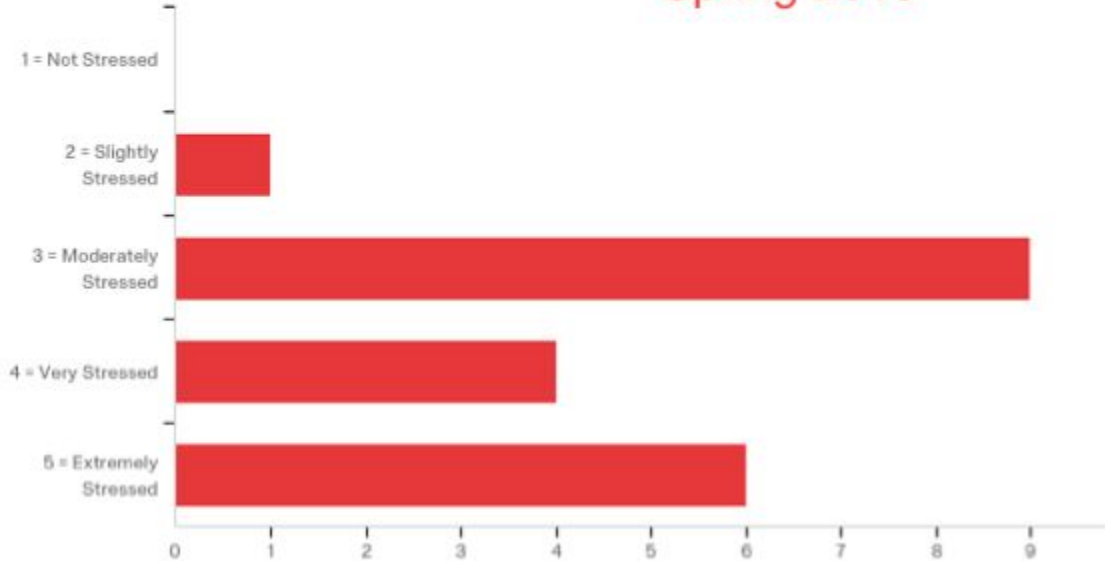


Results!

Stress! pre-event self-reported stress

Q5 - Please rate your test related stress when you arrived at the testing site on a scale from 1 to 5. If you participated in the Wellness Room we are looking for your stress level prior to entering the Wellness Room.

Spring 2019

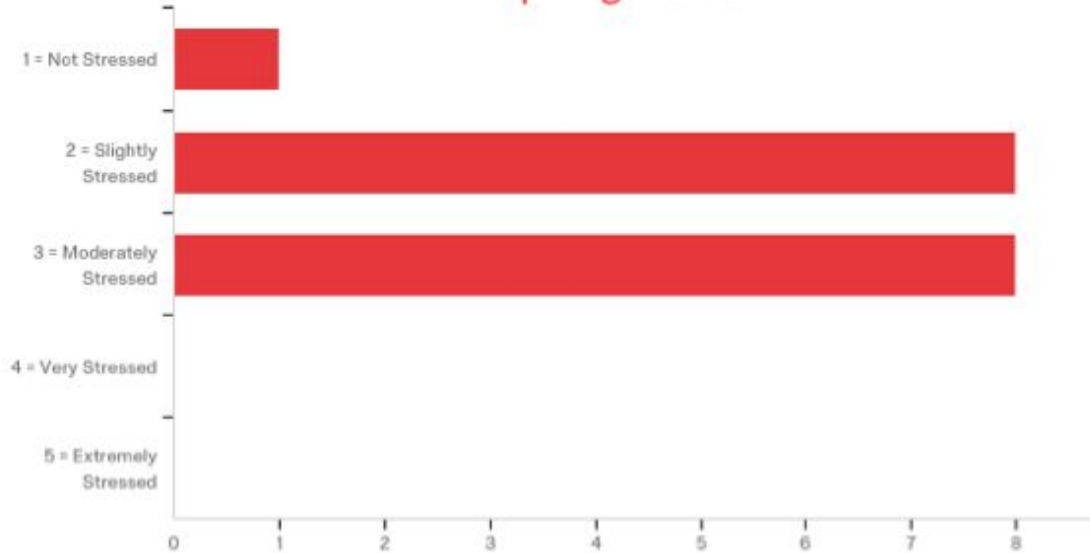


Range = 2 to 5
Mean = 3.75
N= 20

Stress! Post-event self-reported stress

Q9 - Please rate your stress level after participating in the Wellness Room on a scale of 1-5.

Spring 2019



Range = 1 to 3

Mean = 2.41

N = 17

This mean is 1.34 points lower than the pre-event score.

Stress! Pre-event self-reported stress

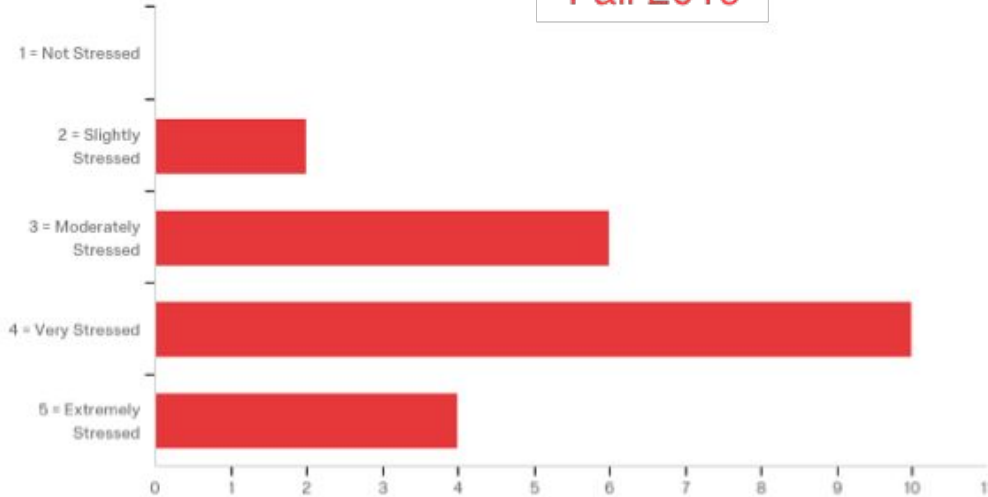
Q5 - Please rate your test related stress when you arrived at the testing site on a scale from 1 to 5. If you participated in the Wellness Room we are looking for your stress level prior to entering the Wellness Room.

Range = 2 to 5

Mean = 3.73

N = 22

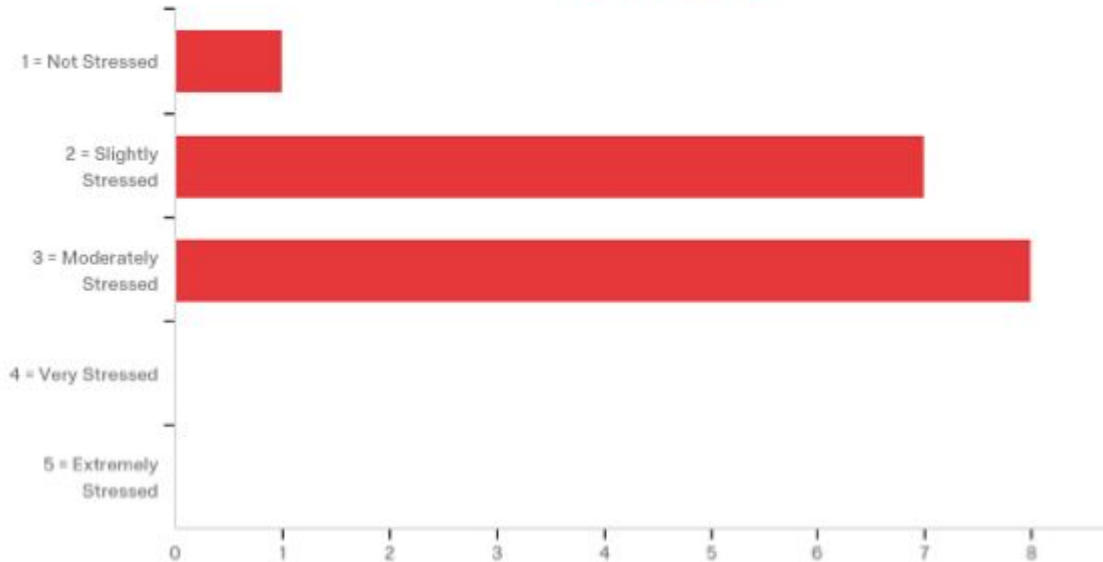
Fall 2019



Stress! Post-event self-reported stress

Q9 - Please rate your stress level after participating in the Wellness Room on a scale of 1-5.

Fall 2019



Range = 1 to 3

Mean = 2.44

N = 16

This mean is 1.29 points lower than the pre-event mean


Why Did you Choose to Attend the Wellness Event?

Themes with Example Responses

1. Social support from peers and faculty
 - “To be around peers before the exam, instead of being in my own head. We all were feeling stressed, so to be together for support was really helpful.”
 - “Because I thought it would be helpful, I wanted to see the dogs, and I thought chatting with classmates and Professor Alessandria would be helpful before the exam. Also, I helped with the event last spring and it seemed to benefit the students then. “
2. Dogs
 - “I really love dogs and seeing them would help take my mind off the stresses for a little bit...”
 - “It was very close to the testing center and I was hoping to reduce stress before the test, and I love dogs.”
 - “Dogs”

Reported Reasons Why People Choose to Attend the Wellness Event cont.

Themes with Example Responses

1. Stress reduction
 - “I wanted to calm my nerves before I sat and took a test and to also make sure I had plenty of time to relax my body”
 - “I wanted to have an opportunity to see classmates before the test, as well as de-stress by petting the dogs!”
 2. Food
 - “I was also happy to hear there were snacks that would be able to grant me that extra energy I may need prior to taking the test.”
- 

What Effect did Participation in the Wellness Event Have on you?

Themes with Example Responses

1. Stress Reduction

“I think it allowed for me to feel less stressed about the exam especially when speaking with those who took it previously. I believed participating in the wellness event relieved some test anxiety as well because it allowed me to realize I know a great deal of information. ”

2. Social Support

“It normalized my stress about the exam. it was nice to have a chance to have fun with the dogs and people and find things to laugh about. Playing with the dogs was both relaxing and distracting. It was helpful to have Nicole share a little about when she took the exam in the summer. I didn’t expect to feel better after writing down my worry and placing it in the jar but I actually did. It felt good to fully “verbalize” it. ”

What Effect did Participation in the Wellness Event Have on you?...

Themes with Example Responses

3. Universality

- “I felt a sense of community with others taking the exam as well as reduced stress”
- “I enjoyed being around comforting people before doing something stressful. It made me feel like we were all in it together, so it was less intimidating.”

4. Dogs

- “Stormy was so sweet, I felt like she knew I was not relaxed and I loved our interaction. It was nice knowing that others were just as stressed as I was. “
- “I loved the therapy dogs because they helped ground me and take myself out of an anxious headspace. “


5. Food

- “I was glad [there] were snacks as I had difficulty eating breakfast earlier because I was so nervous. “



Please Tell Us About Your Experience Interacting with a Therapy Dog

Themes

1. Calming effect
 - “Stormy was very friendly and allowed for me to feel really calm. Overall she was really fun and allowed for me to not think about the pending exam.”
 2. Distraction
 - “The dogs were very lovable and friendly. Having the dogs to pet and get kisses from took my mind off of the test “
 3. Positive Experience
 - “Absolutely the greatest experience. I have never interacted with a therapy dog before but this was such a valuable experience “
 4. Friendliness
 - “They were wonderful. Very calm and friendly and it certainly helped! “
 5. Happy
 - “Loved Stormy. Very cute and excited to greet everyone. Her happiness made me happy and more relaxed/prepared. “
- 

Please Tell Us About Your Experience Interacting with a Therapy Dog, cont.

Other words that came up with less frequency:

Relaxed, loved, comfortable, comforted

- “Stormy was adorable, I went over to her and she immediately came closer to me and allowed me to pet her and she looked at me in my face so attentively, that I really felt like she was saying, it’s going to be alright. ”
- “just loved “the love”...cuddles and kisses”



Most Frequently Used Items in Wellness Room Sp. 19

Interactions with people	29.63%
Interactions with therapy dogs	27.78%
Snacks	22.22%
Stress & Meditation toys	9.26%
Empowering Quotes	7.41%
Worry Jar	3.70%
Gratitude Jar	0.00%
MIndfulness Coloring pages	0.00%

Most Frequently Used Items in Wellness Room Fall 19

Interactions with therapy dogs	27.12%
Interactions with people	25.42%
Snacks	11.86%
Stress & Meditation toys	10.17%
MIndfulness Coloring pages	10.17%
Worry Jar	5.08%
Empowering Quotes	5.08%
Gratitude Jar	5.08%

When rank ordered by most helpful, therapy dogs were #1; Interactions with people was #2 in both semesters.



**An ounce of
prevention is
worth a pound of
cure!**

Practical Considerations...

1. Make sure the animals you bring in are certified therapy animals who are insured to do this work.
2. Therapy animals must be “invited” to the space.
3. Animal and human welfare
 - Prevention of transmission of zoonotic diseases.
 - Facilities management - cleaning the space post-event
 - Are consent forms necessary?
4. Allergies



How are you
implementing AAI
on your campus?



Questions?

Thank you for
attending!

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