

Students dogged by stress get help from therapy pups

March 9 2011, By Kim Lane



Students pet a therapy dog during pre-finals week last spring.

College is stressful, no doubt about it. In fact, a 2009 recent study by mtvU and the Associated Press found that 85 percent of students reported feeling stressed on a daily basis.

And as finals week approach, those [stress levels](#) skyrocket.

“This is the one time of the quarter when all their exams come at the same time,” said Stacey Grady, the UC Riverside Mental Health Educator. “They are also dealing with a change in their schedule and an increased workload.”

To help UC Riverside students deal with the pressure, The Mental Health Outreach team brings out their No. 1 weapon: Therapy Fluffies, a

group of specially trained dogs who know that nothing beats stress better than a lick on the face, a wagging tail and fuzzy hug.

The pups will be on campus from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. March 9, offering themselves for some love and petting. The dogs come to campus courtesy of the Inland Empire chapter of Delta Society Pet Partners, a group that trains animals to visit people in hospitals, nursing homes, hospice and physical therapy centers, schools and libraries.

UCR's finals stress relief program has offered many resources for several years including massages, meditation, yoga, healthy snacks and a campfire night at the bell tower. But none has been as popular as the therapy dogs, said Grady. Last year alone, nearly 1,000 students visited the therapy dogs throughout finals weeks.

Grady said more universities are using programs like therapy dogs to help students de-stress. She pointed to programs at California State University, San Bernardino, UC San Diego and La Sierra University in Riverside as examples.

It's a win-win-win program, she said.

Studies have shown that animals help reduce blood pressure, stress and anxiety levels. Less stress helps students to be more successful. Successful students stay in school and are more likely to be on track for a timely graduation. This helps universities and colleges that are facing impacted student populations and a budget crunch.

And, of course, the dogs enjoy the sessions as much as the students.

"One of the best parts about this program is seeing students smile and how happy the dogs are to be getting so much attention," said Grady.

Students who stop to pet a pooch will also get a bookmark with stress release tips and a dog-shaped stress ball.

“For the sake of your mental health, come and pet a puppy!” said Grady.

Provided by University of California, Riverside

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