

# American College Counseling Association Conference 2019

Creating

Healthy

Actions

Together

An Informal Gathering for International Graduate Students

## Presenters:

Karolyn Senter Ph.D, LPC  
Ph.D, LMFT

Ciloue Cheng Stewart

Washington University in St. Louis

# Introduction

*“Nobody can discover the world for somebody else. Only when we discover it for ourselves does it become common ground and a common bond and we cease to be alone.” — Wendell Berry*

# Objectives

- ❑ **Highlight International Student Trends in the US**
- ❑ **Give Overview of Challenges that International Students face in the US**
- ❑ **Describe the Purpose, Nature, Structure, Dynamics and Efficacy of an Informal Support Group for International Graduate Students**
- ❑ **Explore Options for making CHAT and related projects work on other campuses**

# International Students in US Colleges and Universities

## Trends:

- ❑ From 450,000 to 886,000 in 20 years (1993-94 to 2013-14)
- ❑ 2015-2016: 1,043,839, a 7% increase from previous year
- ❑ 30% are from China

*Source: Institute of International education*



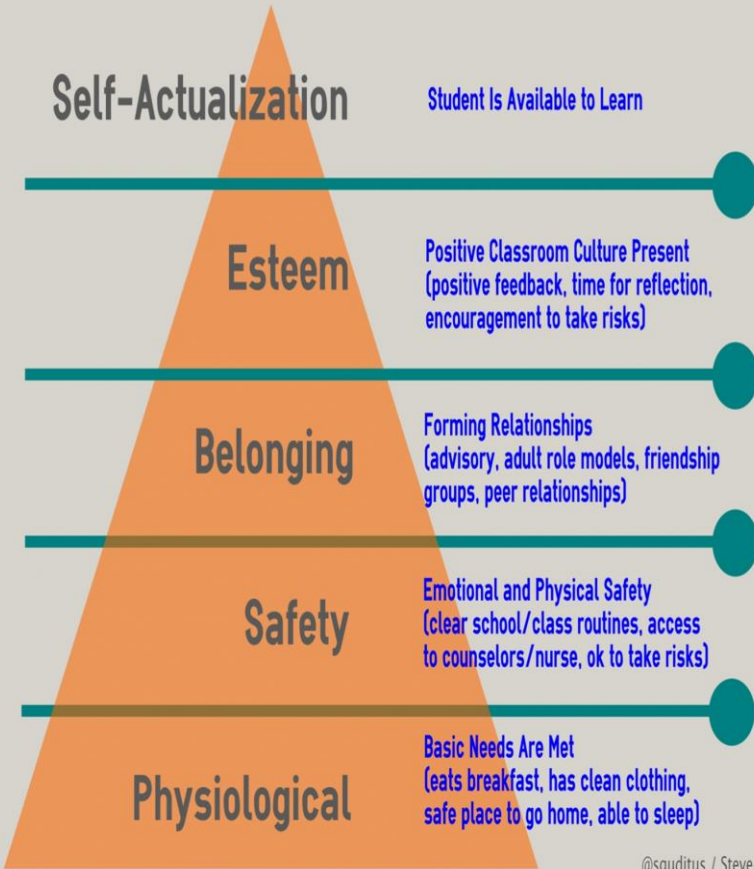
# For International Students in the US

- ❑ Language and communication
  - ❑ Linguistic structure
  - ❑ English proficiency is a weighty matter
  - ❑ We are understood through Language
- ❑ Cultural differences - *Cultural Distance*
- ❑ Adjustment to the North American University system

Challenges/Stressors



# Maslow's Hierarchy of School Needs



- Homesickness and lack of social support
  - Maslow's pyramid of needs and Relational Ontology
  - Challenges and support not dichotomous
  - A double-edge sword
- Discrimination
- Employment restrictions and financial concerns
- Current Political Climate in the US (e.g. travel bans)

# The Graduate Student



© Sean Thomas '95

Traits: Bags under eyes, intermittent sighs  
desperation, nocturnal by necessity, and  
inability to cope with the real world.

# The Graduate Student Experience

Teaching/Writing/ Dissertation/Defense of Dissertation/Research/Publications  
(produce, produce, produce)/Grant writing/Funding/ Advisor-student relationships/  
Family issues/ Intimate relationship issues/ Finances/ Imposter  
syndrome/Perfectionism/ Isolation/Depression/ Anxiety/Procrastination/  
Avoidance/Unproductive habit patterns/ Substance overuse/abuse/Physical and  
Mental Health issues/Health Care

---

**International Graduate Students:**

**Visa Issues/ Uncertainty re: Current Political Climate in the US/ Job Market/  
Networking/ Group work/ Separation from family members/Long distance  
romantic relationships**

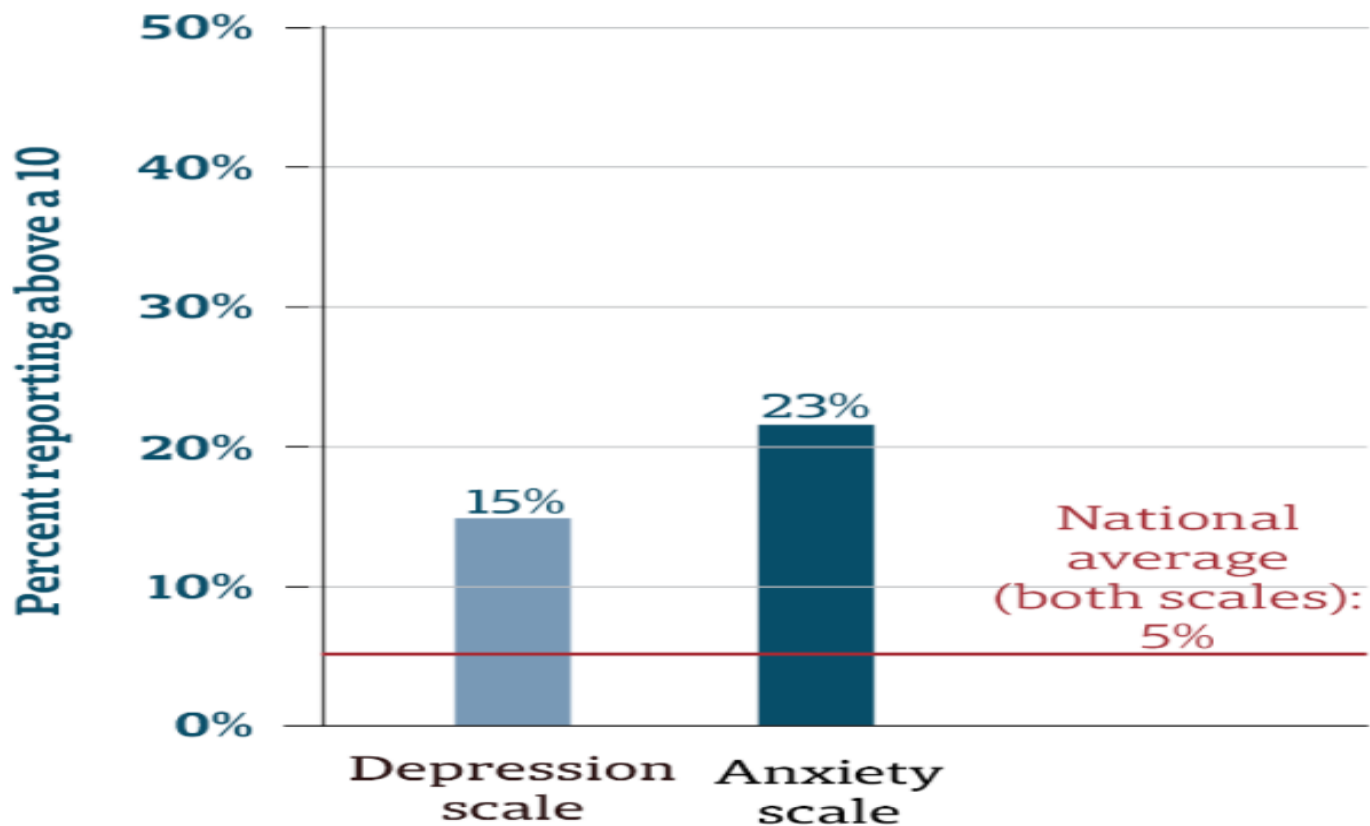


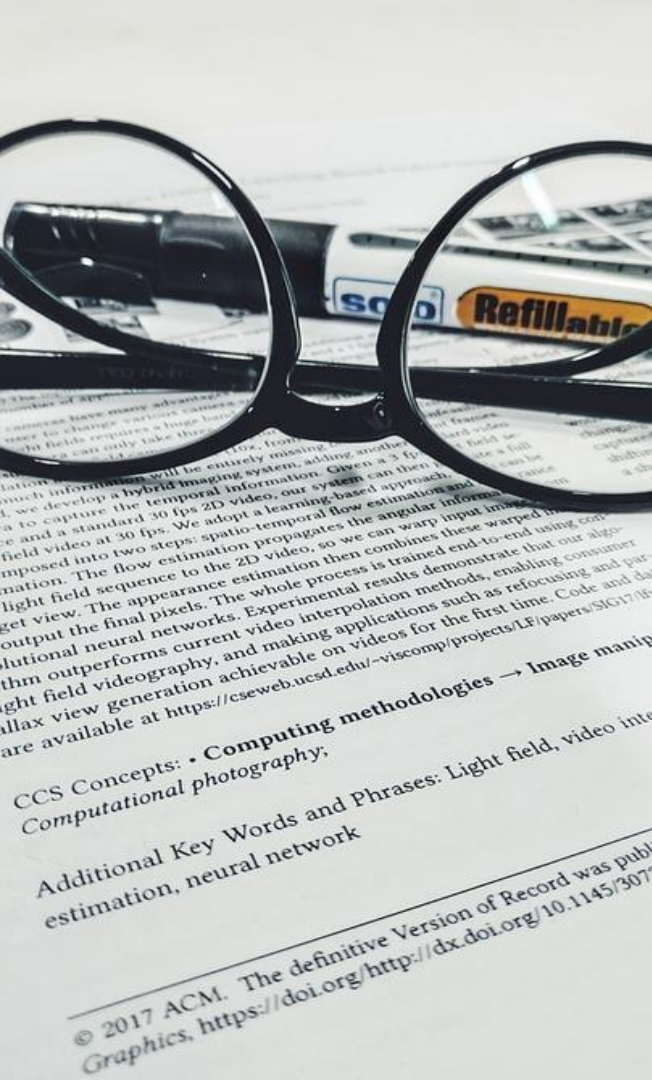
# Empirical Evidence

A new study by a team of Harvard-affiliated researchers [highlight](#) one of the consequences of these realities: Graduate students are disproportionately likely to struggle with mental-health issues.

- ❑ Surveyed: roughly 500 economics Ph.D. candidates at eight elite universities
- ❑ Findings: 18 percent of them experienced moderate or severe symptoms of depression and anxiety. That's [more than three times](#) the national average, according to the study.
- ❑ Roughly one in 10 students in the Harvard survey also reported having suicidal thoughts on at least several days within the prior two weeks. (Other recent studies have had similar findings, including one [published](#) earlier this year that described graduate-student mental health as a “crisis.”)

# Economics Ph.D. Student Mental Health





## Study results also included survey responses from nearly 200 faculty members

- ❑ Many Ph.D. students' mental-health troubles are exacerbated, if not caused, by their graduate-education experiences.
- ❑ Roughly half of the respondents in the Harvard study with anxiety and/or depression had been diagnosed sometime after starting their graduate studies. And students toward the end of their programs were far more likely than those who were just embarking on their graduate journeys to report severe symptoms of anxiety or depression.

CCS Concepts: • **Computing methodologies** → **Image manipulation**  
**Computational photography**;

Additional Key Words and Phrases: Light field, video interpolation, neural network

© 2017 ACM. The definitive Version of Record was published in ACM Transactions on Graphics, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3077>



# Interrelated Nature of Challenges

Language IS culture and reflects our worldview and informs us of our assumptions about how we relate to the world around us.

## A Scenario

*Mary, a first year graduate student from China, is in a Marketing class, where students are assigned randomly to groups. They are given case studies, and need to work together to review and revise marketing approaches and come with winning strategies.*

Western perspective:  
Timid & Not a team  
player

## Micro Aggressions

Potential Impact:  
Alienation;  
Self Doubt; Inadequacy,  
Anxiety & Depression

## Lack of Support

Eastern perspective:  
Steady & respectful

### Western Behavior

- i. Speak up
- ii. Ask questions
- iii. Say something anyways

### Western Values:

- a) Extraversion
- b) Being verbal
- c) Process-orientation
- d) Individual rights
- e) Participation...

### Eastern Behavior

- i. Size up the group
- ii. Focus on outcome
- iii. Sensitive to Group direction
- iv. Do not be a liability
- v. I'll speak up when I know I'm contributing

### Eastern Values:

- a) Outcome-orientation
- b) Control over impulse
- c) Efficiency & expediency
- d) Progress of the group
- e) Evidence of knowledge...

How does Mary appear  
to Group Members?

Reserved  
Tentative  
Courteous  
Few questions  
Not assertive  
Few opinions  
Not active

Language disadvantage:  
1) Reading speed  
2) Listening Comprehension  
3) Cultural References

# Creating Healthy Actions Together

*“Relationships to our context are not only fundamental to our existence, but constitute our existence.... We exist within, and because of, relationships.”*

*Brent Slife*

- ❑ Idea Development for CHAT (informal gathering vs. support group, collaboration of co-facilitators, format etc.)
- ❑ Campus partners involved in the process (location of group meetings, recruitment and advertising)
- ❑ Screening Methods - (Referrals)

*The spirit of the group*

*A sense of community (universality, altruism)*

*Dual-focus (Process-support & Psycho-education)*

*Two co-facilitators: one American born and one foreign born; both with cross-cultural understanding and sensitivity  
(Symbol of inclusivity and integration & the nature of the interactional dynamics)*

FOR INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS

# INTERNATIONAL C.H.A.T.

*Creating Healthy Actions Together is a weekly informal gathering for international graduate students led by experienced group facilitators.*



Sample

Relevant topics during the sessions will include:

- Understanding and adjusting to cultural differences
  - Creating and maintaining meaningful relationships
  - Managing stress under pressure
  - Managing time and energy
- and many more*

**WHERE:** Liberman Graduate Center  
Small Conference Room

**WHEN:** Tuesdays, 1/30 - 4/24

**TIME:** 3:15pm - 4:30pm

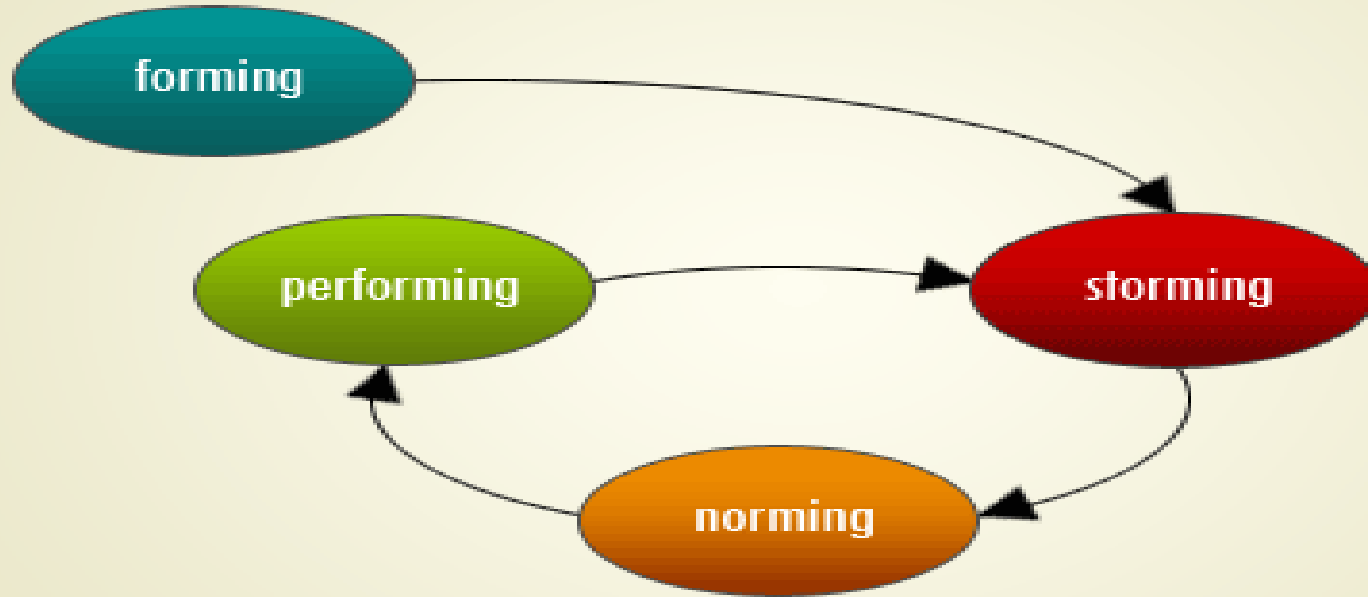
For questions and to register, please contact [karolynsenter@wustl.edu](mailto:karolynsenter@wustl.edu) or [ciloue.c.stewart@wustl.edu](mailto:ciloue.c.stewart@wustl.edu)



Habif Health and  
Wellness Center

STUDENT AFFAIRS AT WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

# CHAT- Implementation (Group Structure and





# CHAT Group Specifics

Semesters: Fall 2017 and Spring & Fall 2018

- Weekly Drop -in Meetings
- Open- Ended ( New students welcomed when space was available)
- Min # of participants =1

Maximum # of participants = 10

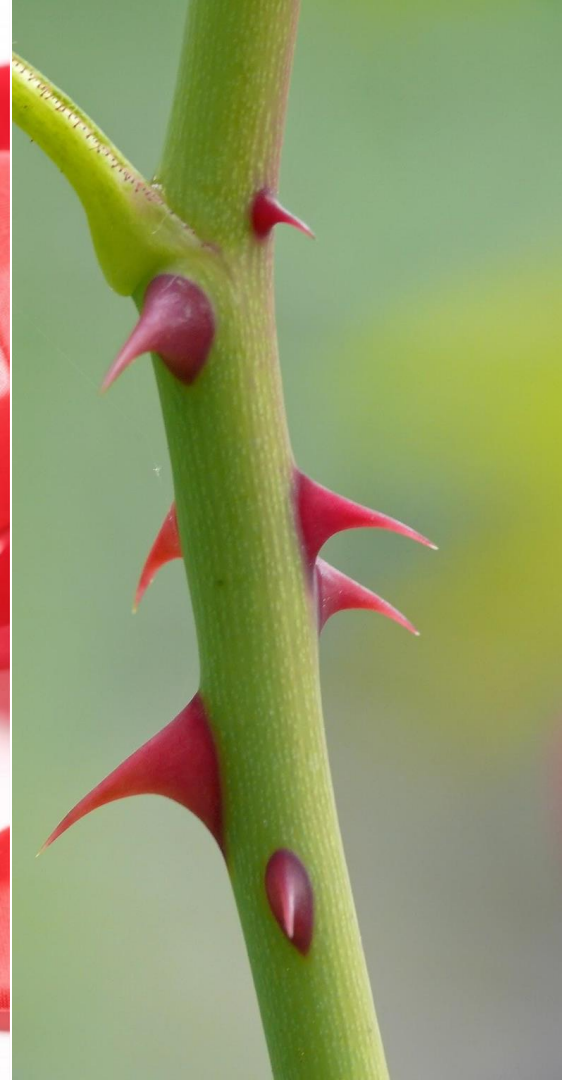
- Average # of participants = 5
- 12 women 9 men

Countries represented: China, Korea, Zambia, Taiwan and Iran

Opening

## Check-in

Roses and  
Thorns



## Middle Phase



Psycho education-Facilitators prepared topics/ activities initially to help students feel more comfortable about opening up. Eventually group members guided the process with issues that were of interest to them.

Students were encouraged to ask questions, make comments, share ideas and concerns.

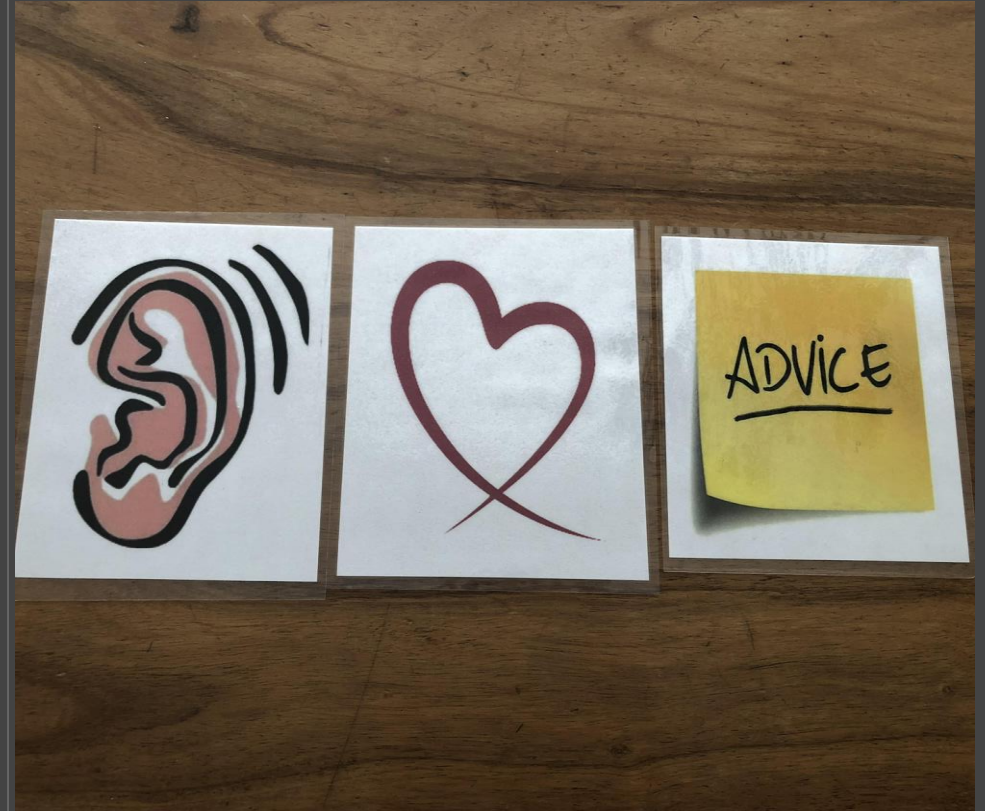
Topics addressed: Energy management/ Perfectionism/Relationships w/ romantic partners, peers, professors and advisors/Cross Cultural communication...etc.

Material used:

White board

Handouts

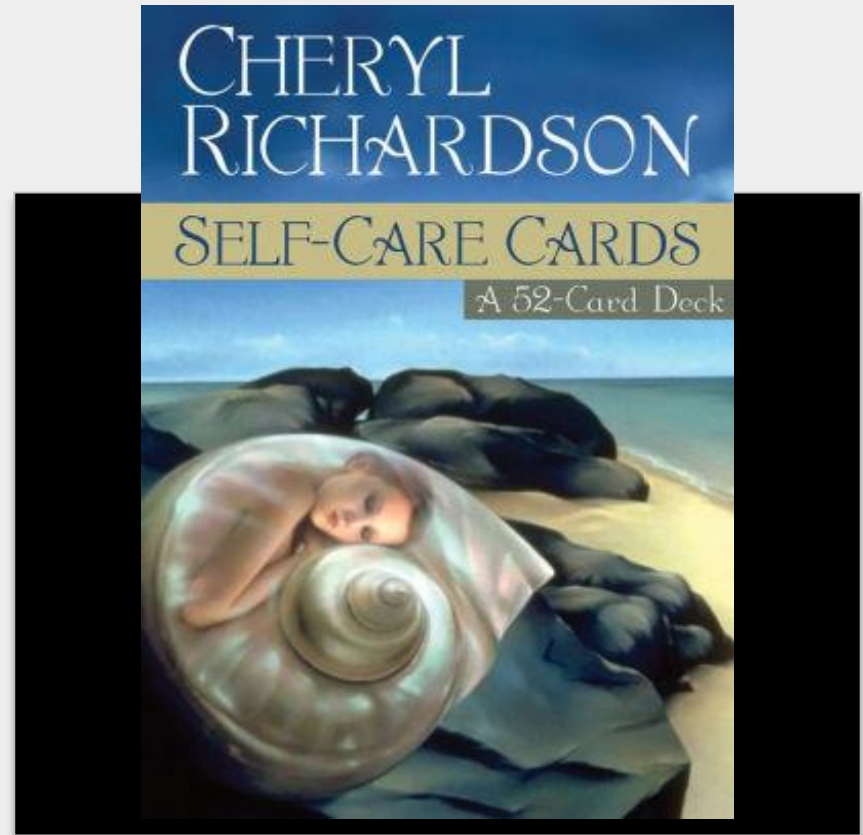
\*Visual Prompts to help students get their needs for empathy, advice or validation met during the session



# Closing

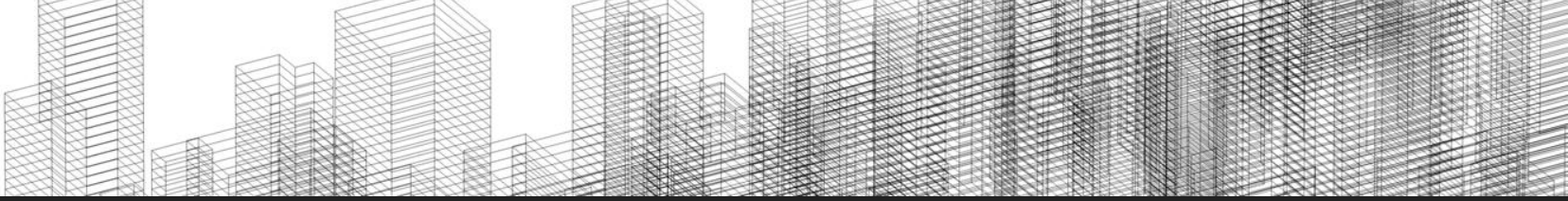
Used the cards to affirm messages of self-care, support and connection.

(Cards by Cheryl Richardson)



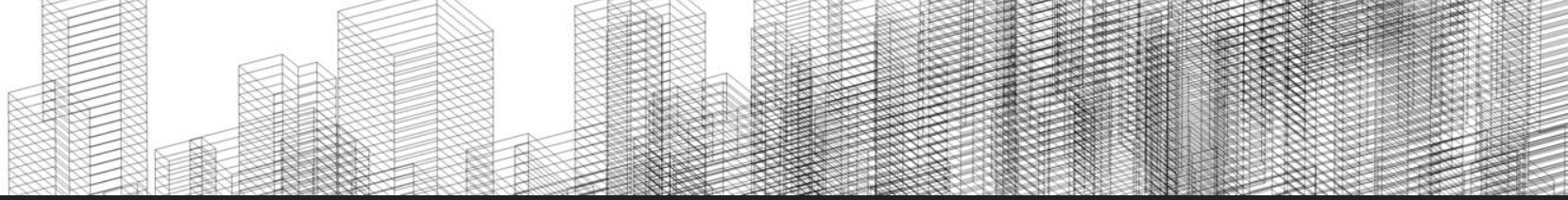
# CHAT and CHEW: A workshop for effective communication in cross cultural settings

- **Born out of CHAT - 3 students volunteered (plus one domestic student enlisted) to serve as Panelists and Small Group Facilitators**
- **Scenarios in 3 settings were created with Cartoons as visual prompts**
  1. Social setting +
  2. In the classrooms
  3. In advisors / advisees interactions
- **Participant randomly assigned to small groups of 5-6**
  1. *Chat and Chew* first in small groups
  2. Debriefing as one large group
  3. Supplementary materials prepared as parting gift for each participant
- **Follow up**
  1. Electronic, anonymous evaluation and feedback
  2. Invitation given and permission requested to follow up with CHAT information



## Endorsements from Participants

***"I cannot thank CHAT (and Ciloue and Karolyn) enough for the support it has given me to my life as an International graduate student here in the States. Away from their home countries, International students like me often find it hard to find community, support, and bonding. Even though the current American university structure provides many social events and activities, there is a void/gap in the university system that actually provides 1) opportunities for close mental support/bonding in a group guided by professional therapists, and 2) education for how to tackle various obstacles of living in a foreign country as a young adult who encounters various psychological challenges. CHAT is a brilliant idea that fills exactly this void.....I've personally benefited greatly from the topics that it addresses, such as procrastination, perfectionism, anxiety, validation, reinforcement, and so on. I think every university should have CHAT built into their institutional structure to support their students. "***



***“C.H.A.T provide us with a(n) inclusive and lovely community with strong bonding. I have made friends and find colleagues here to work on the project I am interested in. When everybody opens up with their roses and thorns, I feel connected and I know always have someone here willing to hear my voice and care about my feelings. I really appreciate the friendly environment C.H.A.T provided and the precious, and often surprising insights and suggestions provided by our counselors and other members in C.H.A.T. I have been here for two semesters. During my time here, C.H.A.T encourages me to know, accept, love and defend myself and teaches me how to better communicate with other people and interpret different situations in a cross-cultural settings. I have grown from a(n) insecure, low esteem, sad person to a confident and vivid person. I am grateful to be part of C.H.A.T and hope to continue to grow with C.H.A.T.”***



# Making CHAT work on your campus

Things to consider:

## Big Picture Planning

Facilitators

Students from diverse backgrounds

Location

Advertisement/Recruitment

Campus Partners

Food



Questions





# Our Contact Information

**Karolyn Senter, M.Ed, Ph.D, LPC**

**Staff Counselor/Wellness Consultant for Graduate  
and Professional Students**

**Habif Health and Wellness Center**

**Washington University in St. Louis**

**[karolynsenter@wustl.edu](mailto:karolynsenter@wustl.edu)**

**Ciloue Cheng Stewart, MSE, Ph.D., LMFT**

**Staff Counselor**

**Habif Health and Wellness Center**

**Washington University in St. Louis**

**[ciloue.c.stewart@wustl.edu](mailto:ciloue.c.stewart@wustl.edu)**

**A Centered Place ~ Psychotherapy Private Practice**

**[www.ACenteredPlace.org](http://www.ACenteredPlace.org)**

**314-973-1130**

# References

Chen J.A., Liu L., Zhao X. & Yeung A. (2015). Chinese International Students: An Emerging Mental Health Crisis. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*. 54: 11, November.

Institute of International Education (2016). International student enrollment trends, 1948/49-2015/16. *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*. Retrieved from <http://www.lie.org/opendoors>

Page, N., Beecher, M.E., Griner, D., Smith, T.B., Jackson, A.P., Hobbs, K. & Kirchhoefer, J. (2018). International Student Support Groups: Learning from Experienced Group Members and Leaders, *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2018.1450106>, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group

Wong, Alia (2018, Nov 27). Graduate School can have Terrible Effects on People's Mental Health. The Atlantic. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/11/anxiety-depression-mental-health-graduate-school>.

Yan, K. (2017). Chinese International Students' Stressors and Coping Strategies in the United States. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/wustl/detail.action?docID=4786852>