



# A<sub>1</sub>: Needfinding for Mental Health

---

Kristine Ma, Carolyn Lee, Lucas Wang, Evelyn Song  
CS147 \* Fall 2024



# Table of contents

---

01

## *Introduction*

Team intros and choosing a project domain

02

## *Needfinding Methodology*

Choosing participants, questions asked, user variety

03

## *Interview Results*

Key quotes, takeaways, insights / empathy maps

04

## *Conclusions*

What's next?





# Meet the team!



**Kristine Ma**  
Junior  
Symbolic  
Systems (HCI)



**Carolyn Lee**  
Junior  
Computer  
Science (HCI)



**Lucas Wang**  
Sophomore  
Design +  
CS (HCI)



**Evelyn Song**  
Junior  
Human Biology  
+ CS (HCI)

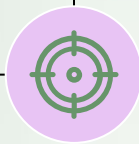


# Choosing a Project Domain

## *University Setting*

---

Choosing a domain that can help students' mental health



## *Shared Interests*

---

Student identity + shared stressors of university life (ECs, classes, work)

## *Burnout & Stress*

---

Concerns that we've generally observed in college students



# Interviewee Criteria

## *Background*

---

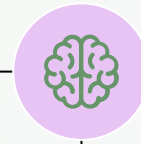
Non-overlapping identities,  
varied universities



## *University Students*

---

Current or recently  
graduated students



## *Mental Health*

---

Some history with  
mental health / ongoing  
struggles

How do you typically cope with stress during the semester?

Tell me about your life both academically and socially.

What role does social support (friends, family, peers) play in your mental health during your time at college?

Have you found any resources that you've found helpful/unhelpful in managing your mental health?

## Key Questions

Have you ever explored mental health services or resources provided by your college?

What are the biggest problems you face in maintaining your mental health in college?

Can you describe a time when you felt overwhelmed by the demands of college life? What contributed to that experience?

How does stress affect your overall mental and physical well-being?





# Interviewee Profiles



**Carl S.**

Sophomore at  
Diablo Valley  
College



**Will H.**

UCLA Graduate  
(‘22),  
SWE @ Google



**Alex C.**

Junior at the  
University of  
Michigan



**Grace J.**

Junior at the  
University of  
Pennsylvania

\*Names changed for anonymity\*

Carl S.



*Chosen because of expressed  
frustration / stress in a public server*

*Unique background as a FLI student  
@ a community college*

*Conducted interview in-person on  
Stanford campus*







## Carl S: FLI & Lost

“If I went to a normal college, things would be set up properly [for me], things would probably be smoother than what I have been experiencing.”

“It has a bit of a depressing feeling— I just keep telling myself, it’s not the end of the world.”

“I don’t know where to go - I feel like [the counselors] are clueless.”



# Carl S: FLI & Lost

## Main Issues

- \* Almost failed classes due to stress, placed on “academic alert”
- \* Couldn’t go to family because of FLI background
- \* Course design makes it almost impossible to transfer
- \* Classes are all online
- \* Unorganized deadlines, no information— missed FAFSA

frustration

stress

## Key Insights

- \* Friends are his main source of support
- \* Online classes— what about his support system at college?
- \* Need for more organization, but doesn’t want “another calendar”
- \* Stays away from mental health resources because they seem “too good to be true”

lonely

Will H.



*Chosen because of experiences with mental health & complete college experience*

*Recent graduate from UCLA, current employee @ Google*

*Conducted interview at cafe in the Bay Area*





*Says*

*Thinks*

*Does*

*Feels*

"I had a pretty chill time in college"

"My mental health is closely linked to how physically active I am"

"Being part of clubs forced me to get closer to people"

"I was more active socially during college days due to, you know, the convenience of living near friends and having things like university events"

"My lack of motivation is something I have to go through in my life, and is something that I still have to work through"

"By default, if it's any person I don't know, I won't trust their advice when it comes to my personal life. They have to prove their advice is sound first"

"Being challenged in other areas of life, like playing Dota, helps with motivation."

"Simplicity in apps is always welcome."

"LA is more interesting than the Bay"

"Ironically Dota is a source of stress at times."

"The resources are always provided by universities and companies, but you have to be willing to want to try them."

Sometimes we know too much about how people feel

Doesn't think wellness apps are that helpful since they spit out the same kind of message or activities to people

Therapy and other mental health resources requires the person to be extremely willing to work on themselves

Most mental health apps are "Duolingo-esque" in the ways that they hold you accountable

Physical activity is key to getting his mind going on other things

Mental health is a broad category and many people may have different issues, which means most apps are too generalized

Burnout impedes his quality of life

Stress came from being aware of his lack of energy

Sometimes we know too much about how people feel

Older generations don't voice out their emotions

Goes on drives to clear his mind

Therapy given during his time in the Singapore army wasn't the most helpful considering it was mandatory rather than optional

Lack of motivation requires an initial "burst" of energy

Shows admiration for those who are constantly motivated to do things

The stigma around mental health has changed and more people are willing to talk about it, making him feel more open

Annoyed at how his thoughts on wanting to do more activities and work contradict with his actions of laziness around

University resources for mental health are "vague"

Feels burnout throughout the year, leading to stress and inaction

Harder to maintain friends while working compared to being in university

Depression symptoms manifest more when he's not as active

Conflicted on what he wants to pursue in life

Took a lot of pauses when talking about his time in university

Makes it a habit to meet with his friends once a week or once every two weeks

Started going to the gym more frequently

Waits to do important things last minute

Swims and hikes often as a way to destress

Plays Dota often as a way to connect with friends and take his mind off things

Usually does an activity with friends (playing cards, going on road trips, hiking)

Showed the resources that UCLA provided versus the resources Google provides for mental health

Gestured a lot when talk about mental health apps and their issues



# Will H: Mandated Therapy

(Extreme User)

“My lack of motivation is something I have to go through in my life, and is something that I still have to work through.”

“By default, if it’s any person I don’t know, I won’t trust their advice when it comes to my personal life. They have to prove their advice is sound first.”

“My mental health is closely linked to how physically active I am.”



# Will H: Mandated Therapy

(Extreme User)

## Main Issues

- \* Not very stressed in college, but struggled with motivation
- \* Distrust of mental health resources
- \* Desire to engage in activities conflicts with “lazing around”

burnout

## Key Insights

- \* Main struggle is with burnout
- \* Mental health tied to physical activity
- \* Doesn't trust mental health apps, and points out that university resources are “vague” and are always offered but students have to be willing to try them

unmotivated

skeptical



Alex C.



*Chosen because of previous mental health struggles*

*“Average user” & not very open about personal life*

*Conducted interview through Zoom*





## Alex C: A Closed Book

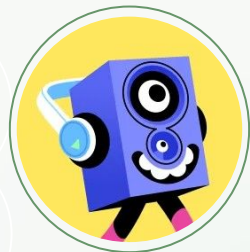
“That’s a tough question. It’s all, like, internal. Mental health is tough. It’s not like, ‘I have school, so I’m sad.’”

“I thought I was going to be doing a lot more in college— joining clubs, making new friends.”

“All of [my problems] come back to my laziness.”

“I’ll probably struggle to answer anything mental health related anyway.”





# Alex C: A Closed Book

## Main Issues

- \* Procrastination, stress / workload before due dates
- \* Unmotivated & “lazy” to do things (e.g. cook for himself)
- \* Generally overwhelmed with schoolwork

unmotivated

## Key Insights

- \* Closed up when talking about mental health, dry responses and more uncomfortable
- \* Heavily reliant on friend group as a support system but doesn't talk to them much about issues
- \* Didn't know about university resources, and expressed unwillingness to try them
- \* Emphasized difference between destressing vs. ideal way to spend free time

closed-off

unwilling

Grace J.

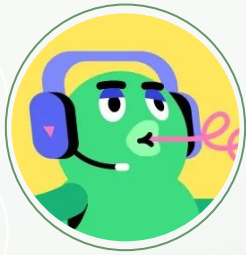


*International student with heavy workload*

*Depression & anxiety disorders as a frosh*

*Conducted interview at Stanford*





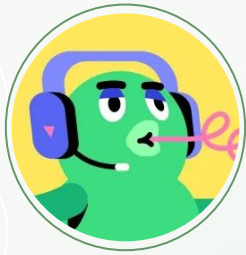
## Grace J: Overseas & Overwhelmed

“I cried a lot when I was a freshman. As an international student, there were so many things I had to learn, especially social cues, and it took me a lot of time to adjust.”

“I felt like I was on the edge of failing.”

“It’s really good for my mental health because I get to see the kids and feel like I’m helping myself, too.”

“Right now, my mental health is great—I don’t have long-term issues. But sometimes, little things can break me, especially interpersonal stuff.”



# Grace J: Overseas & Overwhelmed

## Main Issues

- \* Difficult to adjust as an international student, different social cues and jokes
- \* Generally stressed about workload
- \* Recovery during surgery— some professors unsupportive

unsupported

lost

## Key Insights

- \* Rough transition into college as an international student
- \* Found it difficult to make friends at first, and still wishes she had more
- \* Feels fulfilled by TA-ing, involved in many extracurriculars
- \* Overall, currently good mental health

logical

# Key Takeaways

1.

*Social aspect*



2.

*Unwillingness to  
use resources*



3.

*Common stressors*



# What's next?



1.

*Specific interviews*



2.

*Research & usage*



3.

*HMW, POV  
statements, and  
contradictions*





# Appendix

---



## User Says

- "I don't know where to go - I feel like [the counselors] are clueless"
- "[Counselors] feel like they point me in the right direction, but I wish they were more specific"
- "[Counselors] are at least more helpful than the campus site"
- "If I went to a normal college, things would be properly set up for me ... things would probably be smoother than what I have been experiencing"
- "At least I'll have an associate degree to work jobs"
- "If I didn't make it to a course, I would have to wait until the next semester"
- "I feel not informed ... [like I could] miss the registration day because I'm waiting"
- "[Friends] push aside the feeling of being completely alone, I feel like I wouldn't have anyone to reach out to"
- "[Stress in the semester] makes me feel a depressing feeling. I keep telling myself ... it's not the end of the world"
- "I want better schedule management because I forget things and then beat up myself about it"
- "I want everything to be under one calendar"

## User Does

- Switches major plans to transfer to UC Santa Cruz for an associate's degree and subsequent application to UC Santa Cruz
- Did not course plan initially because he felt he didn't need it
- Schedules meetings with his counselors regularly over the phone
- Drops all courses that his counselors attempt to force on him
- Almost fails courses due to stress and gets placed on "academic alert"
- Had to contact Diablo Valley college to see if he was even admitted in the first place (bad first impression)
- Constantly has to keep in contact with counselors for clarification
- Often ignores college emails sent every 1-2 weeks because they do not feel important or relevant
- Forgot about the deadline for the FAFSA and almost missed it until a friend told him about it
- Looks at Diablo Valley's website for important dates <https://www.4cd.edu/insite/>, which still lacks certain deadlines like FAFSA

## User Thinks

- The Diablo Valley course website is vague and hard to use
- Prerequisite system is difficult to navigate due to the layout of the course website
- Counselors are the main resource for support
- Counselors sometimes create unnecessary problems for him and don't understand his situation well enough
- Important college deadlines (e.g., FAFSA) are easy to miss
- The required courses to get transfer credit from community college to a university is unreasonable
- Announcements made by the university aren't clear
- There's too much information and it isn't organized very well
- It would be better if the college updated information more often (e.g., not talking about a course that hasn't been offered for years)
- Unsure whether to assign fault to himself for poor planning, or counselors and the university
- Not getting into a Game Design major means it will be very difficult to get a job as a Game Designer

## User Feels

- Stressed about planning when so many things are going on in college
- Like community college is inferior to regular college
- Like nobody can help him due to his parents lacking a college education (and thus advice on the experience)
- Uninformed about events and important deadlines by his college
- Slight frustration towards counselors ("are you kidding me?")
- Pressured into specific decisions due to impossible scheduling conflicts (e.g., having 3 prerequisites he still hasn't taken yet)
- Friends play a large portion in benefitting mental health
- His college is "in the middle of the line" - it isn't the best college, but not the worst either
- Mental health apps are "too good to be true"

# Carl S. — empathy map



## User Says

- Socially “been pretty good,” academically “a lot of work”
- “I don’t really use free time to my advantage, I just go on my phone”
- “There are lots of things that you have to plan now and do on your own on top of studying: when to come home, when to cook...”
- “My freshman year was kind of bad— when everyone partied, since I wasn’t into that kind of stuff, I felt left out, kind of alone”
- “I don’t stop procrastinating because there are no consequences. I still get pretty good results 90 percent of the time with procrastination.”
- “That’s a tough question. It’s all, like, internal. Mental health is tough. It’s not like, ‘I have school, so I’m sad.’”
- “I thought I was going to be doing a lot more in college— joining clubs, making new friends.”
- “I don’t eat. That’s a problem, I don’t cook for myself.”
- “All of [my problems] come back to my laziness.”
- “I’ll probably struggle to answer anything mental health related anyway.”
- “I feel like I’m not even taking any classes because none of my classes are required in person, except two of them. I take them with a friend so I end up doing stuff, but for the other ones, I keep forgetting to do things, like participation.”

## User Does

- Long pauses, visible awkwardness when asked about mental health
- Short and dry replies, needed prompting and elaboration
- Awkward laughing / chuckling
- Not involved in many clubs
- Biggest time commitments are working on coding projects (for himself and for classes)
- Lives with his closest friends in an apartment
- Watches shows to destress but made a distinction between ideal way to destress vs. ideal way to spend free time (ideal way to spend free time is to play soccer with friends)

## User Thinks

- Thinks he would be less stressed if he didn’t procrastinate but doesn’t think it’s a big enough problem to stop
- “Laziness” is his biggest problem
- Although he thinks it’s probably better to go in-person to classes, also thinks it’s too far to walk, since they’re on the other side of campus / far from his apartment
- Thinks that there is a difference between destressing and spending free time
- Thought he was “going to be doing a lot more in college— joining clubs, making new friends”
- Thinks mental health is all internal and is tough to talk about / solve
- It’s strange to talk to someone about “those kinds of things”
- Didn’t know UMich mental health resources existed

## User Feels

- Feels unmotivated and “lazy”
- Very reserved and not very inclined to talk about personal life, feels awkward talking about mental health
- Feels that life is monotonous and that he is “not a real person,” thinks that he doesn’t do anything interesting
- Relies on his friends as a support system
- Believes that mental health is complex, may feel that the issue is unsolvable
- Feels distrust and discomfort towards mental health resources

# Alex C. — empathy map

## User Says

- "I didn't know where to make friends or connect to people"
- "A lot of professors are not nice when I was recovering from my surgery"
- "I can't zone out even for a second in class as a MechE major & double minor - they're all proof based"
- Frosh: finding her place at UPenn, didn't want to explore for the sake of exploring so she took a lot of major requirements (classes) instead
- Soph: more plugged into the community by joining clubs; found the (academic) love of her life which is MechE; socially feel ill annoyed bc 1) the school of engineering denied her club's student storage request so they had to store all the planes in her dorm, 2) her roommate eloped w her boyfriend leaving a lot of logistical issues w her dorm, 3) a couple friends crashed in her dorm due to their housing issues (apparently UPenn doesn't do a good job w student housing assignments) which she kindly agreed to, but those people didn't help her when she just finished surgery & refused to move out (!!)
- "Being a junior gives me a lot of **responsibilities**. Ppl in my clubs & classes [that she's TAing] rely on me for leadership, giving the right directions & solutions to psets. Despite doing heavier work its actually a very satisfying feeling"
- As a frosh she took intro to chem E which was very time consuming (pset takes 15 hrs/wk). This semester she's TAing the course and helping newbies **she likes like healing her younger self.**

## User Does

- Pretty relaxed throughout the interview. We did it at the psych lounge in main quad.
- Very committed to her clubs, 1) Penn Aerorobotics where she builds planes with talented people and goes to competitions, 2) Penn rubik cube which she cofounded. [She holds the record for 3x3 in Asia]
- Supports UPenn frosh thru various programs as an upperclassman mentor.

## User Thinks

- Coming from an international background, it's very hard to vibe with locals, especially when her culture has a strong emphasis on studying >> partying and she **doesn't like small talks**.
- Colleges could provide more standardized support to students missing school due to medical reasons, instead of having prof taking it case by case.
- She feels very plugged in as a junior, being the leadership for three clubs & a big sis for school of engineering mentorship programs & an orientation week volunteer.
  - The feeling of people relying on her makes her more motivated and satisfied
- She has very few "genuine friends" which she thinks is true to all college experiences. **Most people she met doesn't reciprocate her kindness.**
- Its important to vent and not overthink, which is how she recovered from anxiety & depression. She thinks **a little bit of shit talk is good for MH.**

## User Feels

- Glad about where she is rn after a chaotic first year and annoying second year.
- Depressed regarding her social situation as an international student.
- Her kindness was not reciprocated by the girls who crashed in her dorm - huge disappointments - and thereon became more apathetic to non-close friends
- Challenged but satisfied with her TAship & mentorship for UPenn frosh.
- Anxious about the upcoming rubik cube competition her club's hosting.
- Disappointed by how bureaucratic her school administration is.
- Loved and supported by her community as a junior.

# Grace J. — empathy map