

Staying Motivated in Graduate School

How do happiness and well-being
affect your productivity?

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Graduate Student Happiness & Well-Being Report | 2014

Berkeley

The
Graduate Assembly

Graduate Student
Happiness & Well-Being
Report | 2014



ga.berkeley.edu/wellbeingreport

Graduate Student Well-Being Survey Report | 2016

*University of
California*

The University of California
Graduate Student Well-Being Survey Report



University of California Office of the President
May 2017

What is well-being?

Quality of life

Subjective well-being or happiness

- Satisfaction with life
- Emotional experience

Broad portfolio of positive and negative indicators

Other approaches

Why well-being?

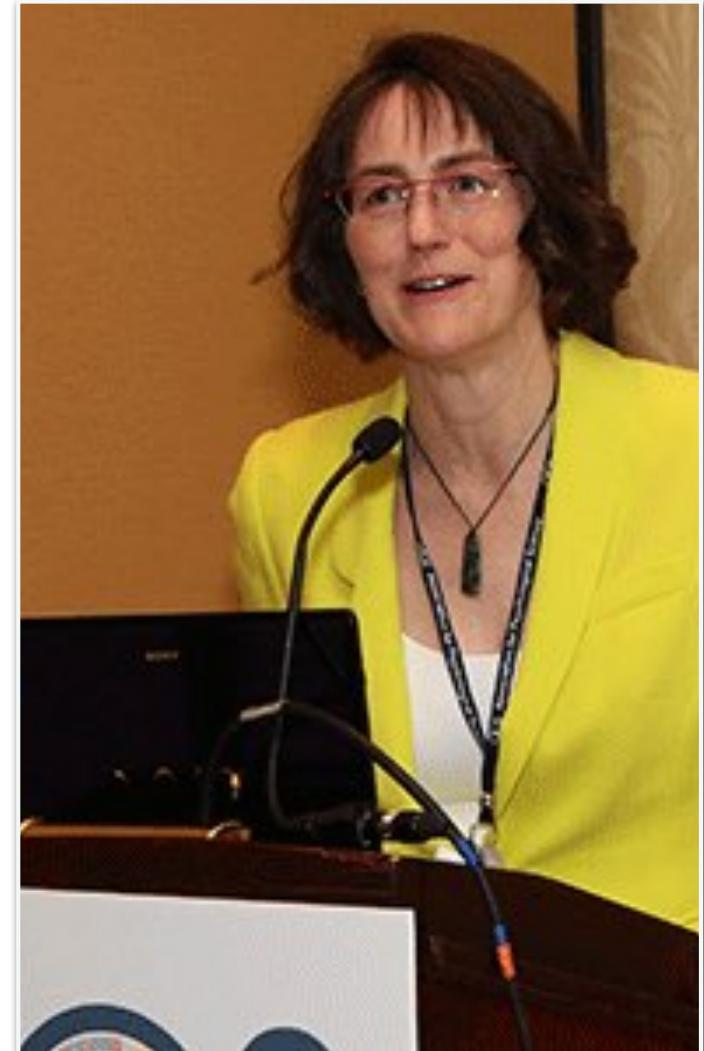
Inherently desirable

To enable us to do our best work and make the most of our time in graduate school

Balanced, happy people are more productive, more creative, more collaborative, better at long-term goal pursuit, more likely to find employment, more physically and psychologically resilient, and more.

Broaden-and-Build Theory

“Positive emotions broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires, which in turn serves to build their enduring personal resources”



Barbara Fredrickson

Graduate Student Well-Being Survey Report | 2016

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Targeted Outcomes

Satisfaction with Life

Among the most widely-used well-being measures.
5 items, Diener et al. (1985)
e.g. “*The conditions of my life are excellent.*”

Depression

From the Center for Epidemiological Studies and
widely used in psychiatric epidemiology.
20 items (revised), Eaton et al. (2004)
e.g. “*I lost interest in my usual activities.*”

Original Working Model

30 candidate predictors for the two targeted outcomes were drawn from well-being literature, a graduate student focus group & consults.

Data behaves coherently (in 2014, 26 of 30 items relate to the two outcomes in expected directions).

10 demographic items

Top Predictors

Satisfaction with Life

Career Prospects

Overall Health

Social Support

Depression

Overall Health

Academic Preparation

Career Prospects

Also: Financial Confidence, Sleep Hours, Skipped Meals, Feel Valued & Included in Program, Academic Progress, Living Conditions, Mentorship & Advising. These last two are not top predictors of depression.

Top Predictors Overall

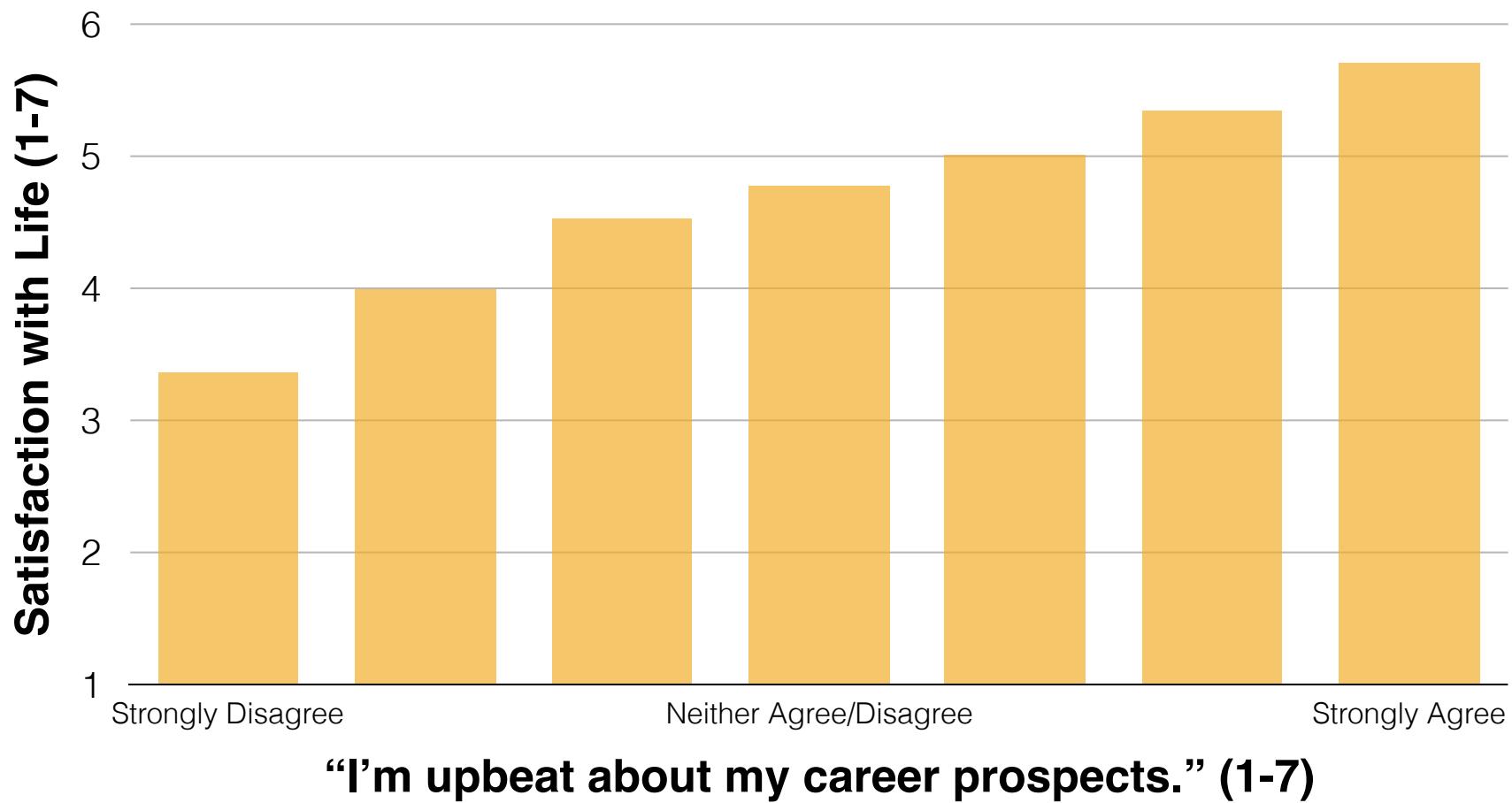
1. Overall Health
2. Career Prospects
3. Social Support
4. Academic Preparation
5. Financial Confidence
6. Sleep Hours
7. Skipped Meals
8. Feeling Valued & Included
9. Academic Progress
10. Living Conditions
11. Mentorship & Advising

Top Predictors Overall (STEM)

- 1. Overall Health
- 2. Career Prospects
- 3. Social Support
- 4. Academic Preparation
- 5. Feeling Valued & Included
- 6. Mentorship & Advising
- 7. Skipped Meals
- 8. Sleep Hours
- 9. Academic Progress
- 10. Living Conditions
- 11. Financial Confidence

“I was miserable in my first advisor’s lab and was planning to leave my program if I didn’t find another lab. Fortunately, I was able to switch labs and things are MUCH better now. The root of this problem is that faculty gets zero mentorship training.”

Perceptions about **career prospects** influence satisfaction with life



Showing results for Berkeley only. Average response is 4.5 (Neither/Slightly Agree)

“The largest source of anxiety for me is my post-grad job outlook. It is tremendously uncertain, and thus fear-inducing.”

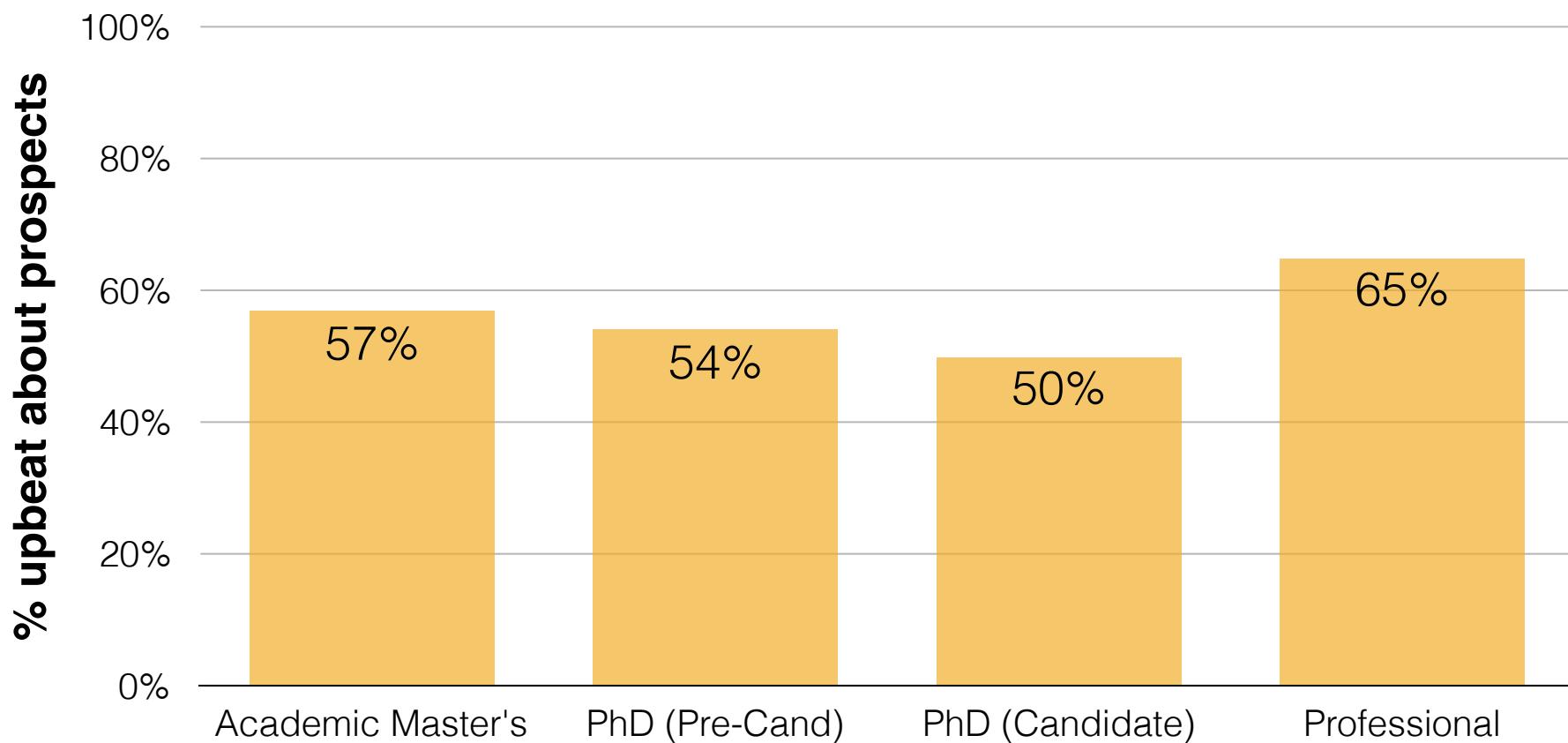
Berkeley

“I don’t feel competitive or prepared in any way for academic jobs, and I think in some sense it is a failure of both my advisor and the graduate system to even admit people like me into PhD programs.”

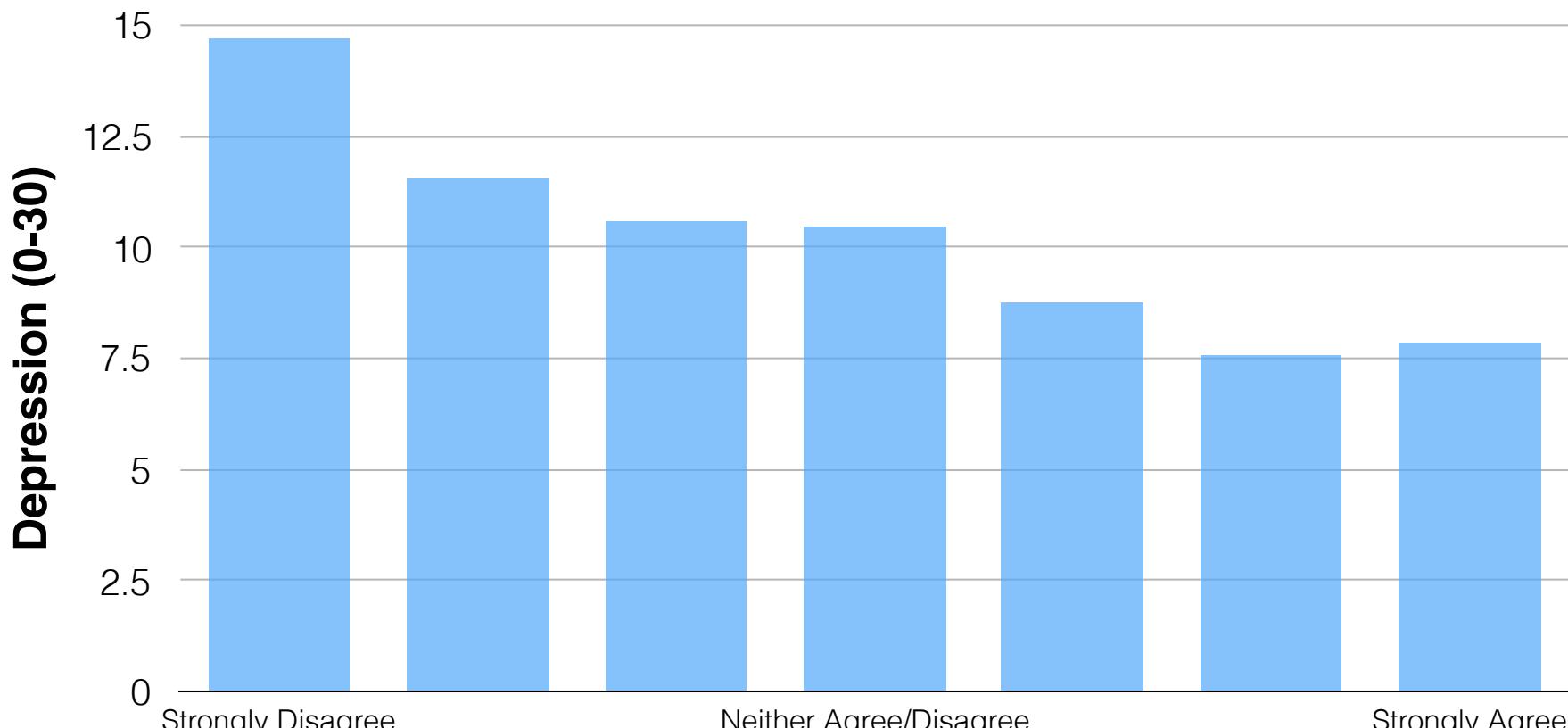
Berkeley

“It seems like non-academic careers are something my department doesn't want to touch with a 10-foot pole.”

Within STEM, **advanced PhD students** are less upbeat about their career prospects



Getting **enough sleep** to feel fully alert alleviates depressive symptoms



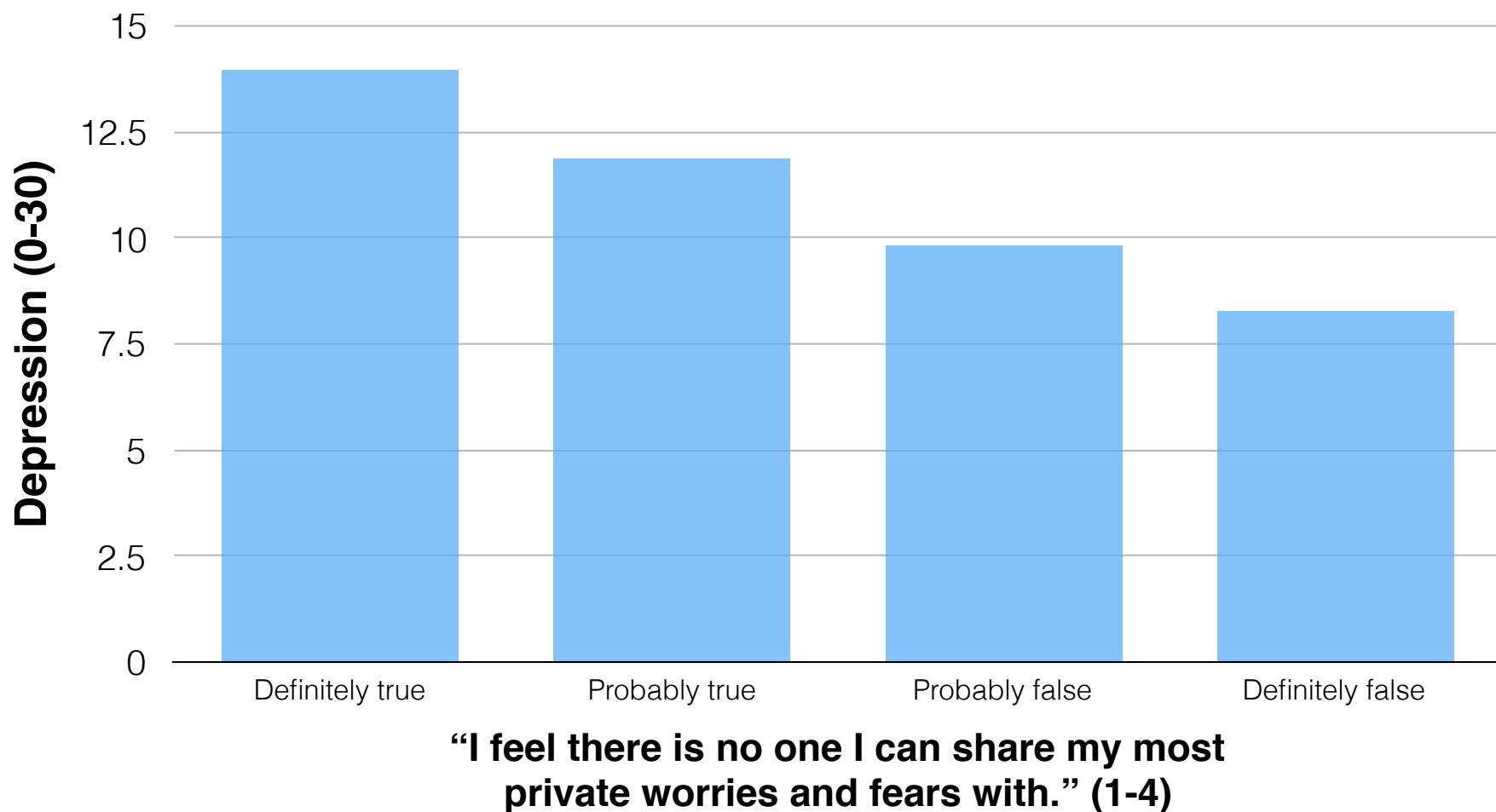
“During the past week, I’ve been able to get enough sleep at night to feel fully alert and well-rested during the day.”

Showing results for Berkeley only. Average response is 4.1 (Neither Agree nor Disagree)

Only 20% of Berkeley
graduate students said they
get the recommended
8 hours of sleep.

Berkeley

Social support plays a major role in graduate student well-being

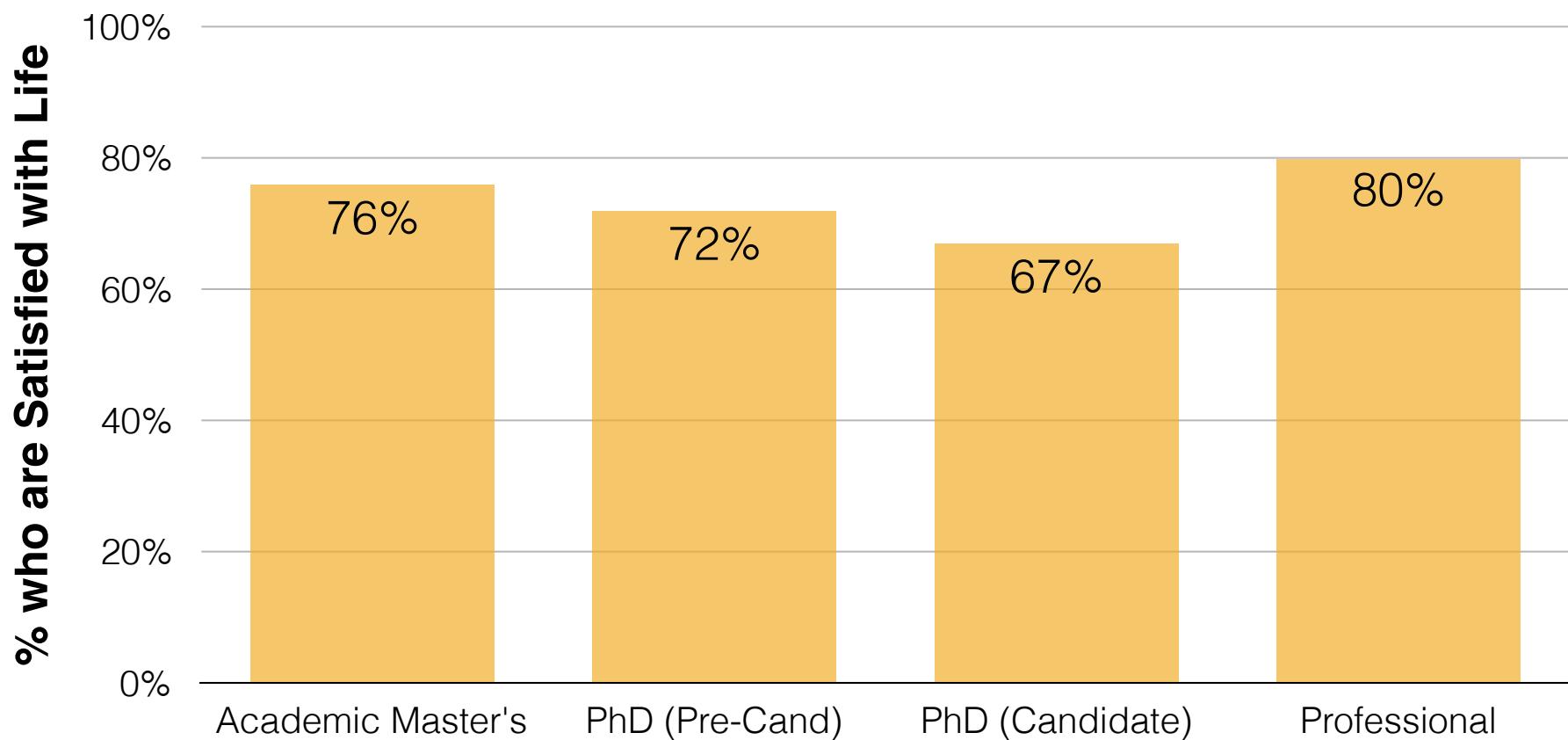


Showing results for Berkeley only. Average response is 3.2 (Probably false)

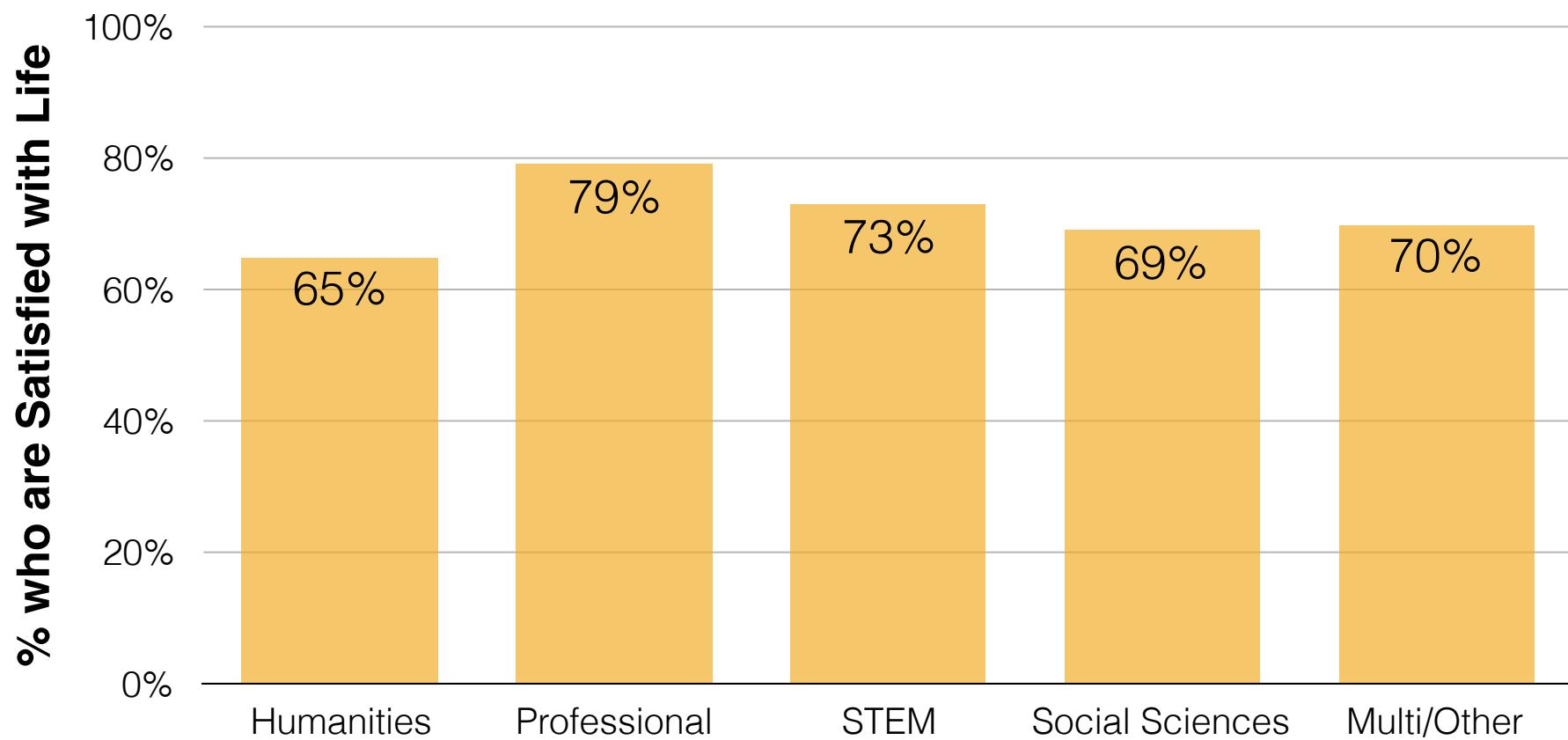
“I live on my own for the first time
and it is very lonely. I wish there
were more exciting ways to meet
other grad students.”

Berkeley

Advanced PhD students are less satisfied with life than others



Arts & Humanities students are less satisfied with life than others



Depression is not uncommon in graduate school

35%

of students reach
the threshold for
depression

(\geq 16 out of 60
on revised scale)

Demographics of well-being offer some good and bad news

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer graduate students report *lower* life satisfaction and *higher* depression.

There are **no well-being gender or ethnic gaps**, and international students experience *less* depression.

In 2014, parents and married students tended to fare a bit better than others, and older students a bit worse.

Some policy recommendations

Follow the roadmap provided by top predictors

Promote well-being strategies students recommend

Reduce hassle factors (*Behavioral Economics*)

Start a dialogue

Institutionalize the survey, promote future research

Well-being strategies **graduate students recommend**

Exercise (43% of responses)

Maintain hobbies & leisure activities (40%)

Social support, friends, family, social groups (30%)

Time outdoors, yoga, meditation, cooking, spiritual practice, music, pets, therapy, TV, reading.

“Meditation works wonders to help anxiety. Ten minutes a day has vastly improved my ability to focus and not engage in obsessive thinking.”

“Running I strongly recommend.”

“Take time off before bed.”

“Therapy is great. We have to bring down the stigma around it.”

“I believe in a lot of time spent outdoors.”

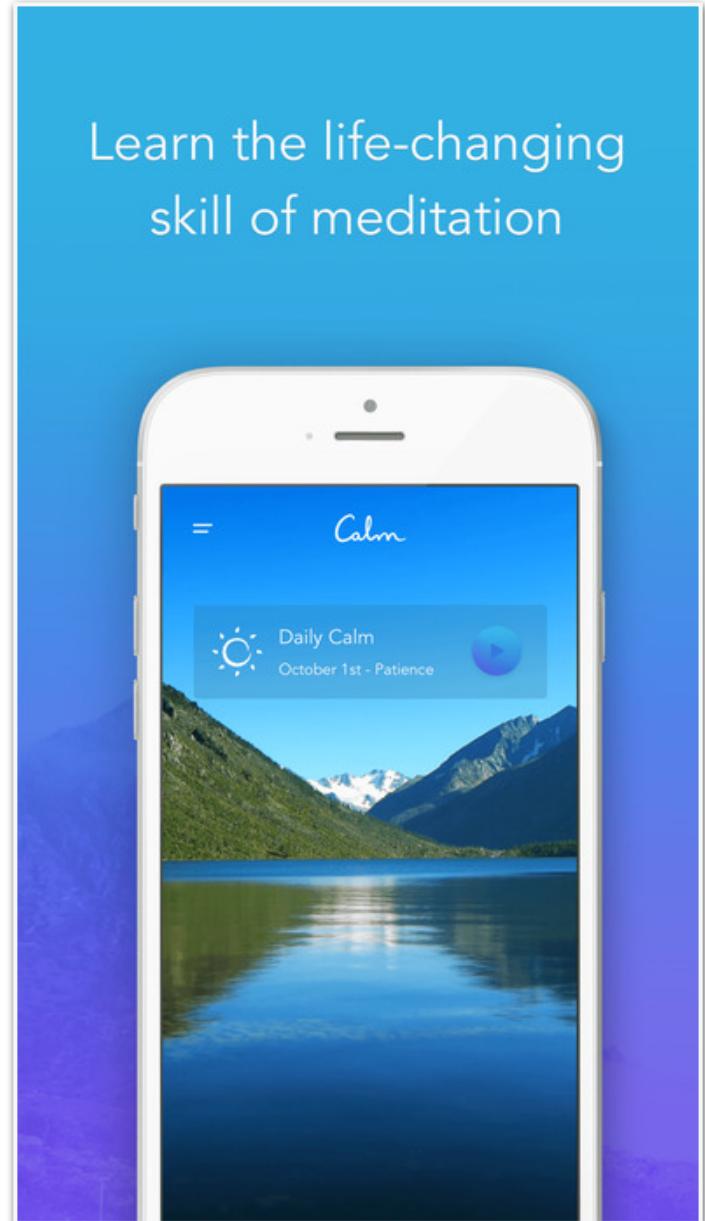
Berkeley

How to meditate

Find a quiet place to sit with your back upright.

Download the Calm app and start **7 Days of Calm**.

Meditation improves focus and reduces stress.



iOS and Android

www.espn.com/new-york/nba/story/_id/11694723/phil-jackson-mindfulness-training

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Players subject to change. ©2017 USTA. Photos ©Getty Images.

Knicks take 'mindfulness training'

Ian Begley
ESPN Staff Writer

Oct 14, 2014

If nothing else, the [New York Knicks](#) will be a little more Zen under Phil Jackson.

Jackson revealed Sunday that he has hired someone to put the team through "mindfulness training" this season.

"This is one of the things that they have to go through if they're going to be part of the Knick organization," Jackson said at the New Yorker Festival in



How to optimize sleep

The body likes consistency and needs time to transition into and out of sleep.

- Keep regular bed and wake times even on weekends.
- Establish a 30-60 minute routine before bed to dim the lights, put devices down and wind down.
- Get up even if you experience *sleep inertia*.

No caffeine after 12 p.m. or naps after 3 p.m.

The best sleep is alcohol-free.

Cultivate a growth mindset

Can you change your basic intelligence?

Which of these two statements do you **endorse**?

You have a certain amount of intelligence, and you can't really do much to change it.

You can change even your basic intelligence level considerably.

— Carol Dweck. See also: mindsetkit.org

Good news about the brain

Neuroplasticity

Brains are malleable and they **grow and develop** in response to challenges.

You **can** improve your intelligence and abilities and change your habits.



Having good spatial skills strongly predicts achievement and attainment in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields.

Can spatial skills be trained?

You can train spatial skills

THE CONVERSATION US PILOT

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Beliefs about innate talent may dissuade students from STEM

June 9, 2015 4:01pm EDT



Author

 **David Miller**
Doctoral Student in Psychology,
Northwestern University

[My research](#) has looked at how opportunities such as sketching engineering designs shape basic spatial skills such as mentally rotating objects. These skills [are important](#) to success in math-intensive careers, yet [often neglected](#) in education.

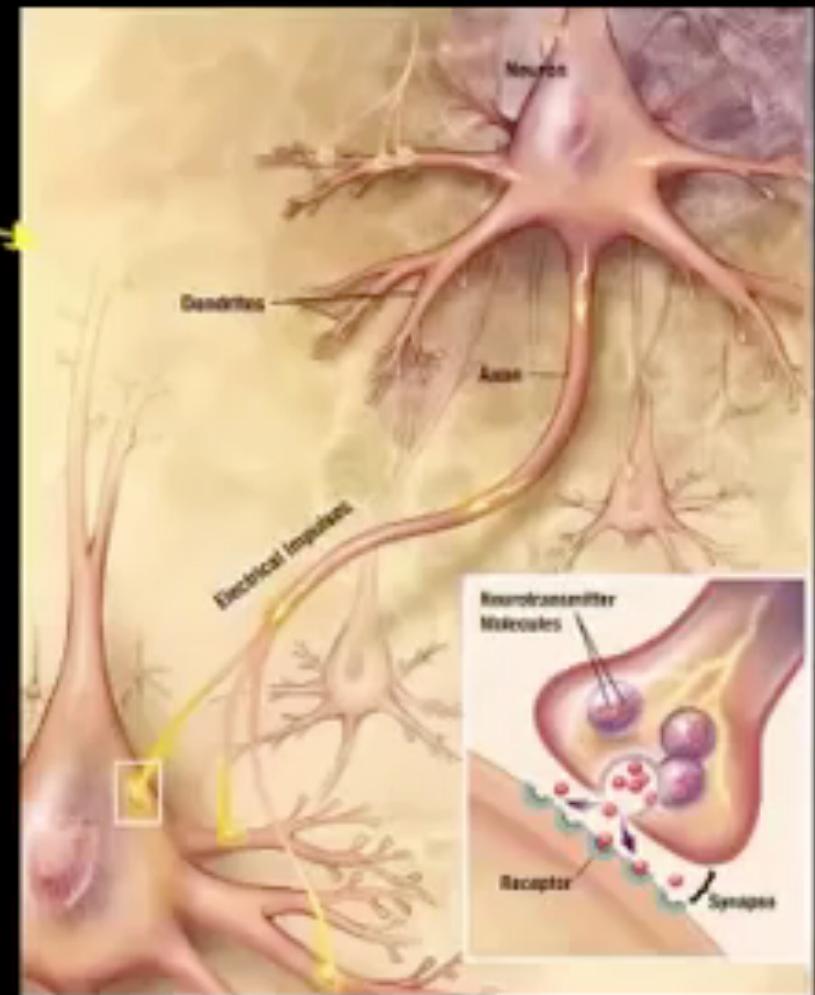
“Oh, but you can’t teach those skills,” teachers often say when I’ve discussed my research with them. Contrary to such beliefs, [I found](#) that 12 hours of spatial instruction improved students’ spatial skills and grades in a challenging calculus-based physics course. In fact, [a quantitative review](#) of 217 related studies found training spatial skills was “effective, durable, and transferable.”

[Email](#) **It's OK – not everyone can do difficult math.**

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neurons
80 - 100 Billion



For reflection

If you want to “get smarter,” should you work on things that are easy for you, or things that challenge you? Take greater or fewer risks?

How might you apply (to your life or to others’ lives) the finding about the brains of animals who live in cages vs. not?

Is it possible to change the basic patterns of how we think, feel and behave? e.g. can we simply “get in the habit” of being happier?

Learning is a process of development.

No matter where you are in your process, you can take a step toward greater understanding.

Q&A