THERAPY DOGS
in libraries
REDUCE STRESS
during finals

SUMMARY

- As a relatively new and popular trend, therapy dogs are being brought into libraries during finals exams to help students manage stress. This research shares the captured effects of one therapy dog program at Montana State University Library, and attempts to quantify self-reported stress levels of students before and after interacting with therapy dogs.

"[Students] get to forget about finals and just live in the moment petting the dogs. You can see their faces change with smiles and joy when they see the dogs!"
~Intermountain Therapy Animals Volunteer

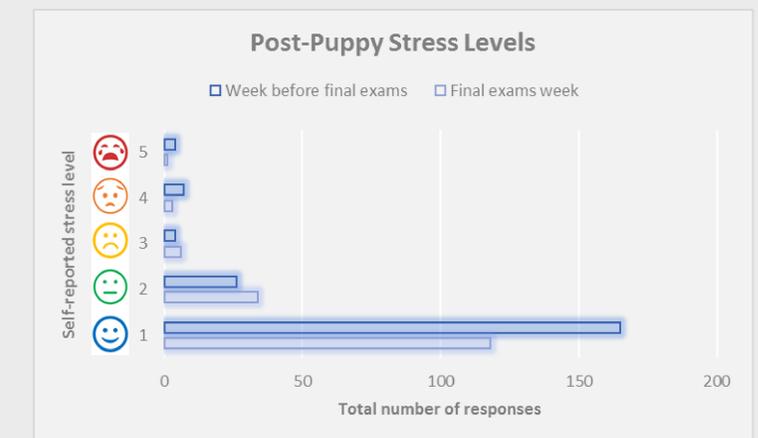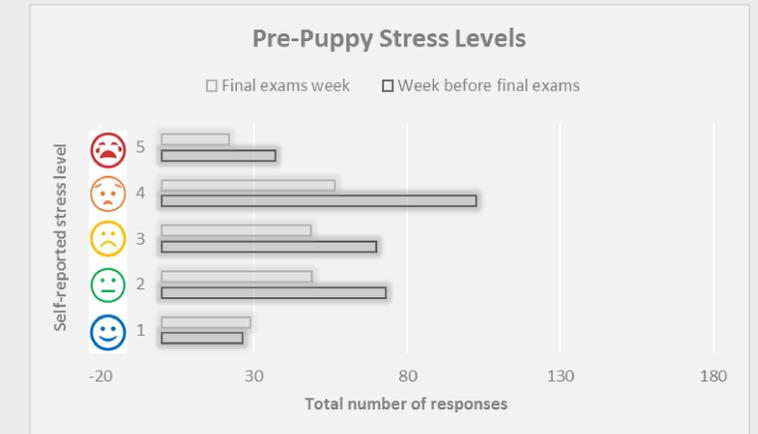"I almost cried because of how relaxed I felt!" ~student comment

"The best part of the semester!"
~student comment

"Genius! Perfect idea to get rid of stress!" ~student comment

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the effects of therapy dog programs on student stress levels during final exams in academic libraries?

Pre-Puppy Stress Levels

☐ Final exams week ☐ Week before final exams

Self-reported stress level / Total number of responses

Post-Puppy Stress Levels

☐ Week before final exams ☐ Final exams week

Self-reported stress level / Total number of responses

METHODS

- At Montana State University Library, the Paws to de-Stress program brings in therapy dogs for the last two weeks of each semester over final exams. Volunteers bring their registered therapy dogs for two hours a day, Monday - Friday at varying times. Students drop by and stay as long as they want.
- Attendees were asked to self-rate their stress level on a scale of 1-5, with accompanying emoji-like faces (shown in charts). Students marked their stress level using tally marks on a flip chart when entering, and again on a different flip chart with the same scale when leaving. Five represented being stressed to the max, and 1 represented not being stressed at all. Students were also asked to fill out a survey.
- The pilot study in the fall of 2016 compared the average stress levels of all students entering, compared with the average of all students leaving.

PILOT RESULTS

- In the fall of 2016, 1141 students attended Paws to de-Stress over the course of two weeks. 514 students self-rated their stress levels at an average of **2.91 entering** out of 5. Then 368 students self-rated their stress levels at an average of **1.35 leaving** out of 5, for an average stress-reduction (self-reported) or change of 1.55 points out of 5. This equates to an average of

53% STRESS REDUCTION

with a p-value of <2.2e-16 and a 99% confidence interval.

- In addition to quantitative data collected, anecdotal evidence and qualitative data was overwhelmingly positive, as shown by the comments from students and volunteers alike collected via survey.

NEXT STEPS

- In the spring of 2017, MSU Library plans to repeat this study, with an added layer of tracking and matching each individual's self-reported stress levels when entering and leaving. This will add statistical significance, showing the change of self-reported stress level at the individual level.