


# A SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL FOR ADDRESSING STRESS ON THE COLLEGE CAMPUS

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“Stress has become so much a part of everyday language that, at first glance, there appears no need for a definition. It is a scientific concept which has suffered from the mixed blessing of being too well-known and too little understood.”

Wolfgang Linden, 2005

# How do we define Stress?

- Stress has been operationalized in a variety of ways, contributing to the wide diversity of results in the review of stress research.<sup>1</sup>
- Strategies used to measure stress must include a clear definition of the “stress” construct relevant to the particular population of interest.<sup>2</sup>
- There is no uniform definition of stress or instrument to measure stress standard to the practice of HPHE.

# How do we define Stress?

- Most existing research on college student stress is limited to coping strategies/how students respond to stress and identifying intrapersonal or interpersonal stressors.
- One definition: “Stress is the result of an individuals’ perceptions that they do not have the resources to cope with a perceived situation from the past, present or future.”<sup>3</sup>

# How do we define Stress?

- Most research done about *stress* is really the measurement of the *stress process*, or, in other words, the *result* of the stress process. (Linden)

# How do we measure stress?

- Survey instruments
- Observation
- Biophysical indices
  
- The literature, at best, reports only moderate correlations between
  - ▣ Biological changes
  - &
  - ▣ Self-reported stress
- This holds true even under relatively transparent circumstances


# How do we measure stress?

- Very few qualitative or longitudinal studies<sup>4</sup>
- Quantitative scales<sup>4</sup>
  - ▣ College Chronic Life Stress Survey
  - ▣ Life Experience Survey
  - ▣ Hassles Scale
  - ▣ Social Support Inventory
  - ▣ Hassles Assessment Scale for Students in College
  - ▣ Academic Stress Scale

# What is Stress?

## □ Assumptions:

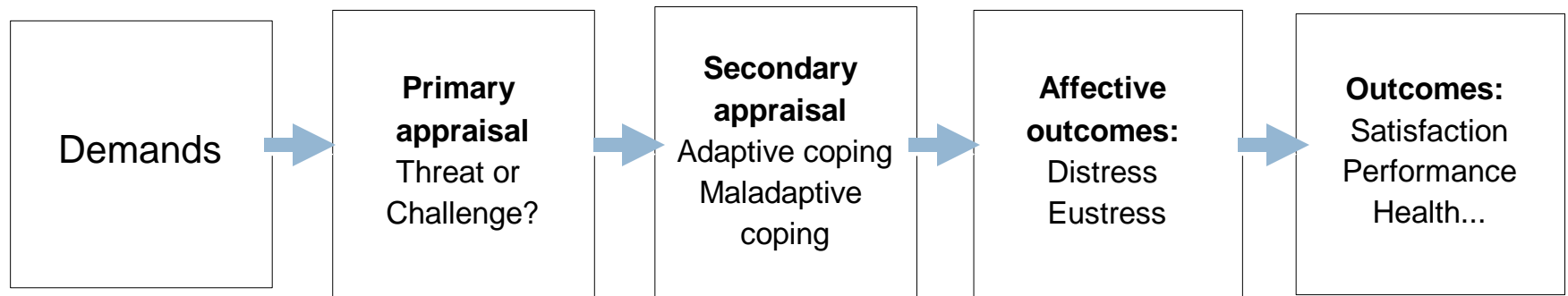
1. Stress is ubiquitous
2. Stress can be both positive and negative
3. Everybody has the capacity to alter their stress reactions
4. Today's world has more stressful stimuli than ever before
5. Stress is a result of both inside the body & outside the body factors
6. Measuring stress in humans is a challenging task
7. The best way to understand the stress cycle is from an holistic approach (mind, body, environment)
8. Stress is a process, not a "thing"



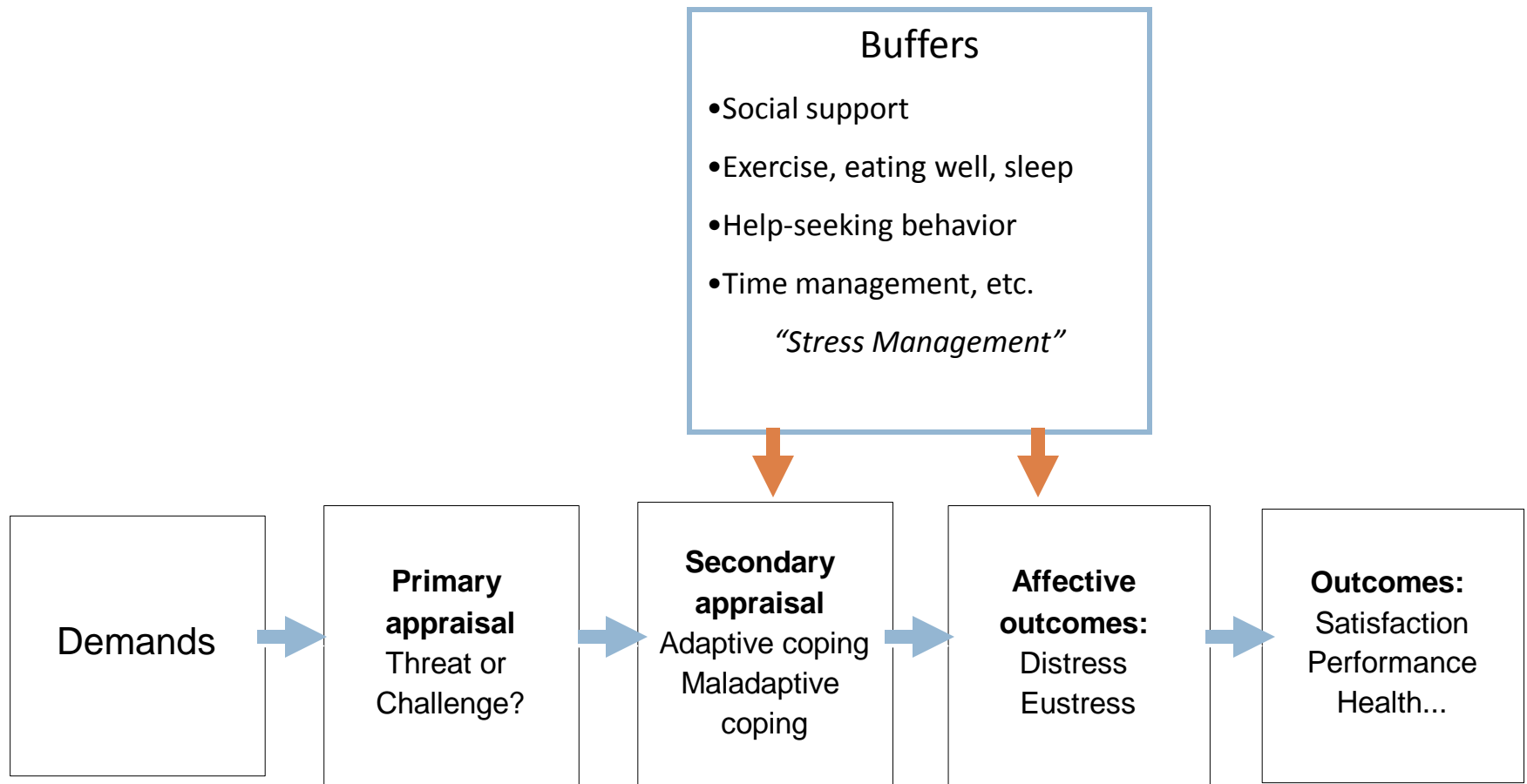
Stress is “a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being”

(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

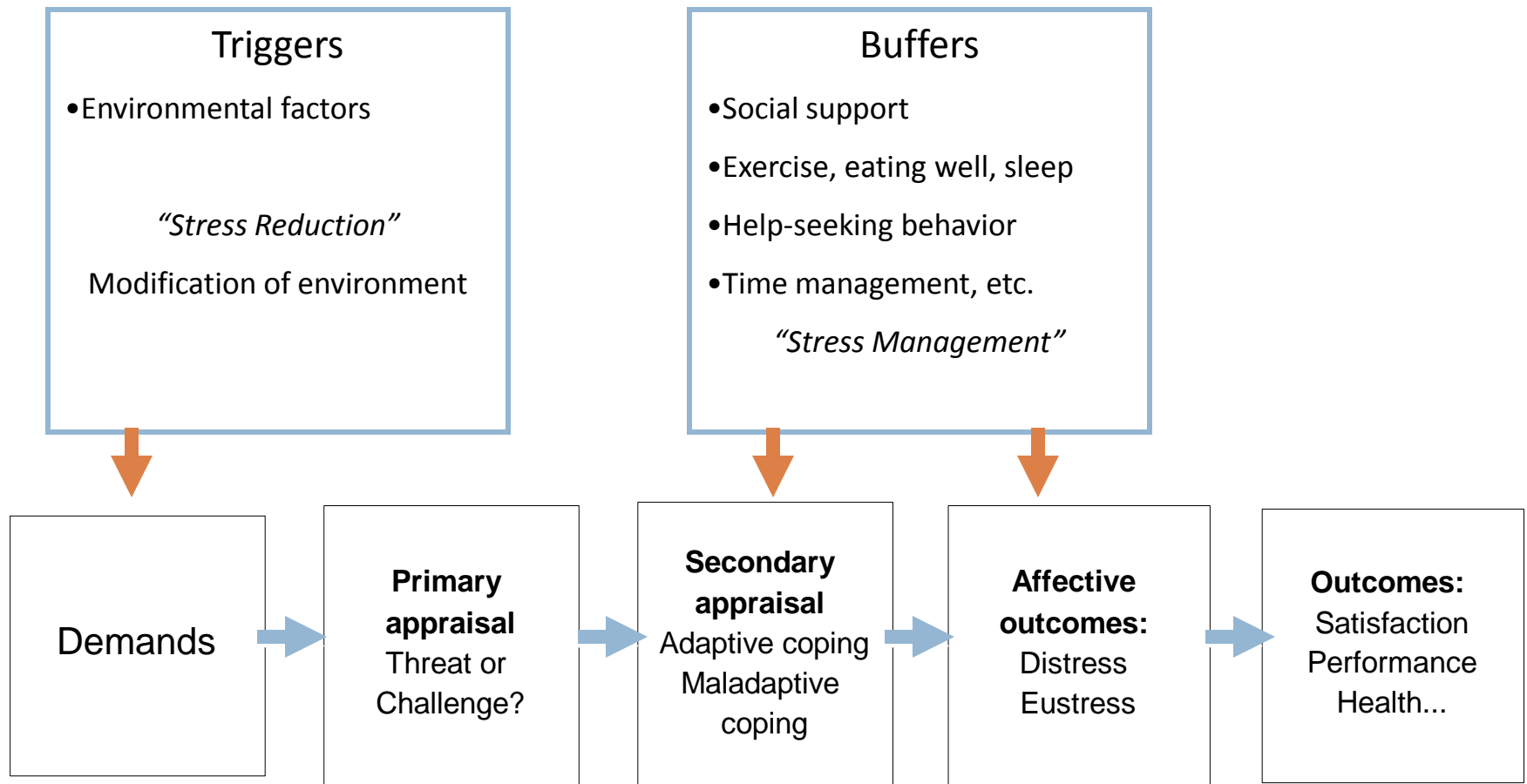
# Transactional model of stress: stress as a *process*



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# Definition & Measurement: Summary

1. Stress is a vague term – difficult to define and measure
2. Prolonged stress depletes the body's resources and can have consequences for a person's emotional and physical health
3. Stress is not a fixed state but a multi-phased process with interacting cognitive, behavioral, and physiological components
4. Transactional perspectives of stress emphasize the interactions between appraisal, coping, and environment

# Student Stress: The Literature

- Stress is the number one reported impediment to academic performance.<sup>5</sup>
- Stress is inherent to the college experience which is filled with major transitions and demands that force students to constantly assess and adapt.
- Major sources of stress in college include change in sleeping habits, change in eating habits, new responsibilities, increased workload, financial difficulties, and social activities.<sup>6</sup>

# Student Stress: The Literature

- “Greater perceived conflict with a faculty or staff member significantly increased students’ perceived frequency of stress.”<sup>7</sup>
- 55% of students claimed their biggest stressor to be academic in nature.<sup>7</sup>
- “Residence hall environment factors played a prominent role in the amount of students’ self-reported stress.”<sup>7</sup>
- Examinations, public speaking, interpersonal relationships, and the transition from structured home environments to independent living are other unique stressors that are present in the collegiate environment.<sup>8</sup>

# Student Stress: The Literature

- “The built environment of schools may stress users of the facility both directly and indirectly.”<sup>1</sup>
- “The coping processes used to resolve stressful situations are affected by the design of the environment.”<sup>1</sup>

# Student Stress: The Literature

- There are discrepancies in students' responses to negative threatening events (stressors) which can be attributed to differences in the ability to cope successfully and the perceived capacity to deal with the stressor.
- Members of minority student populations experience different, and often greater, stress than their non-minority counterparts.

# Current Practices for Addressing Stress

- Stress Management Workshops
- Time Management Skills
- Counseling
- Conflict Resolution Skills
- Deep Breathing
- Yoga
- Meditation
- Guided Imagery
- Relaxation rooms
- Stressbusters
- Stress balls, aromatherapy, etc.

# Social Ecological Perspective

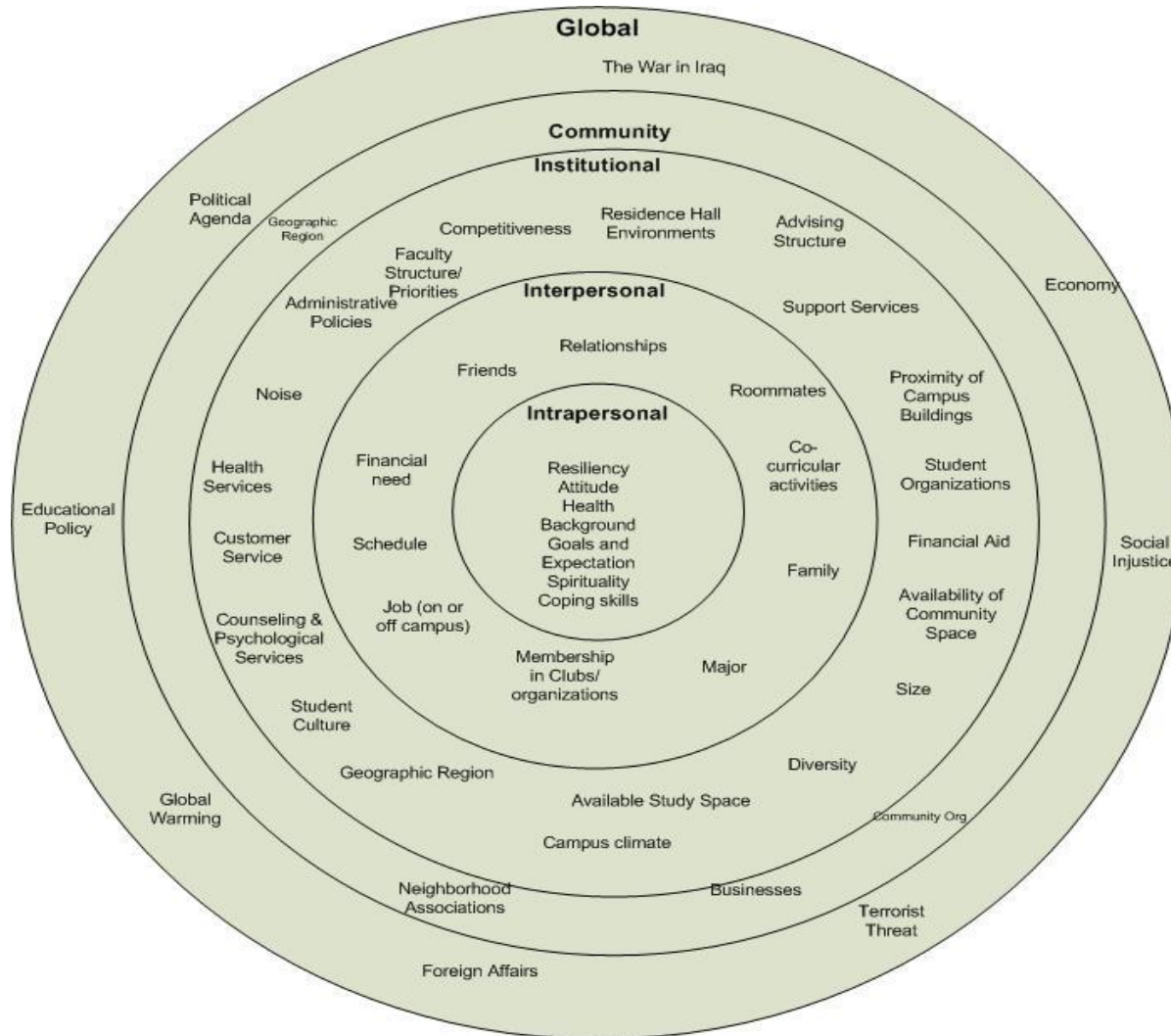
- Based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model for child development.<sup>9</sup>
- McLeroy and colleagues propose social ecological model for health promotion.<sup>10</sup>
- NASPA- Leadership for a Healthy Campus, An Ecological Model for Student Success.<sup>11</sup>

# Social-Ecological Theory/Model for Health Promotion

- “(F)ocuses attention on both individual *and* social environmental factors as targets for health promotion...(and) addresses the importance of interventions directed at changing interpersonal, organizational, community, and public policy.”

Originally based on Uri Brofenbrenner’s 1979 model of child development and expanded upon by McLeroy and colleagues in 1988.

# Social Ecological Model for Stress



# Intrapersonal Level

Intrapersonal/Individual level factors impact the way each individual will uniquely respond and adapt to stressors or experiences in his/her environment.

Example:

Level of Impact	Factors	Possible Impact
<b>Individual/Intrapersonal</b>	Individual characteristics: Resiliency, attitude, past experiences, background, goals, expectations, coping skills, time management skills, economic status, health status, religion, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity/race, gender	Impacts the way in which a student copes with the stressors, the types/degree of stressors perceived by the student

# Interpersonal Level

Interpersonal factors are the social networks and structures in which the student has a direct or immediate relationship. This includes friends, partners, family, roommates, clubs and organizations, job/supervisor, RA, and major classes.

Example:

Interpersonal	Factors	Possible Impact
	Job (on or off campus)	On campus work study may have positive impact on student engagement- off campus may have deleterious effects due to travel and time constraints placed on student
	Membership in organizations	Positive- social network/social capital Negative- time demands, exclusionary membership criteria, may have less time for academics

# Institution

The institutional level is made of social and organizational characteristics, as well as the institutions physical structures. This includes: financial aid policies, advising structures, class schedules, competitiveness, lighting, noise, availability of study space, air quality, safety, residence hall environments, proximity of buildings, administrative processes, campus leadership, support services, etc.

Institutional	Factor	Possible Impact
	Campus Climate	May particularly impact non-dominant group students through intolerant attitudes, students may not feel supported by institution, students may feel competition to be stressed
	Advising structures, Class schedules	Multiple tests on the same day, time between classes,

# More Institutional Level

<b>Institutional (organizational)</b>	Health Services/Counseling and Psychological Service	Stigma of seeking counseling, services may be seen as inaccessible, first time having to manage one's own health care.
	Residence Hall Structures	Poor lighting, poor air-quality, noise, unclean environments, far from class or campus buildings, no common lounge space.

# Community Level

- The community level includes the geographic or cultural/social community in which the campus lies. Factors within this level include community organizations, local laws and governing structures, the physical attributes of the location, community services, and the relationship between the University and community members, disconnect between campus and community beliefs/attitudes.

Community	Factor	Possible Impact
	Location in community, built environment, neighborhood associations, businesses, community leaders, local laws/law enforcement, off-campus housing	Safety concerns, lack services near campus, stressful commute and transportation issues, students disregarded in community affairs or dismissed by business owners, community members protesting university/university functions.

# Global Environment



The Global level includes organizational and structural issues external to the campus community that may indirectly impact student stress. Some of these issues may be addressed through lobbying and changes in the national agenda.

Global issues that may impact student stress include: foreign affairs, war, the economy, social injustices, national political agenda, global warming, etc.

# Proposed Interventions for the Institutional Level

- Population-led initiative to conceptualize student stress and determine solutions
  - ▣ Photovoice project
- Assessment of the built environment (Environmental Scan)
- Working with faculty to change course schedules (fewer exams on the same day)
- Changes in administrative policies and processes
- Changes in financial Aid policies
- Gatekeeper training for Faculty, Staff, and Student Leaders
- Changes in the campus “stress culture.”

# Cultural Change

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- Social Marketing
- Identify Change Agents (use SEM to guide)
- Community-based participatory research
- Community-led interventions

# Proposed Measurements of Environmental Stressors

In the current school year, to what extent have the following conditions caused you to feel stressed?

	Not at all	Very Little	Some	Quite a Bit	Very Much
Noise in my living environment					
Distractions in my study environment					
Messy or unorganized living environment					
Air quality in my living environment					
Lighting in my living environment					
Lighting in my study environment					
Physical distance between my living environment and classes					
Lack of available healthy food choices on campus					
Lack of available study space on campus					
Lack of available space to relax and hang out on campus					
Inefficiency of administrative processes on campus					



Questions?

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