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| **Exercise 5.3.2b Generating Problem Statements** |

For the purpose of this exercise, let’s assume that you have critically read and analyzed the literature on the topic of stresses on graduate counselling students. Your summary of the literature contains the following themes and subthemes (included here without citations for the purposes of this exercise only).

* Stressors on graduate students in counselling include
  + finanical demands: tuition fees, loss or limition of paid employment;
  + family demands: time management, multiple roles, emotional give and take;
  + demands of graduate school: time commitments, intellectual demands, interactions with others, professional standards and expectations;
  + social support: isolation, strain on existing social support systems, new interpersonal demands.
* Characteristics of current graduate counselling students include
  + average age: 30;
  + most work at least part time;
  + many have children;
  + some have aging parents;
  + students in online programs are no longer congregated in major cities.
* Problems or challenges graduate students face include
  + mental and physical health problems;
  + inability to meet the demands of graduate programs;
  + family breakdown;
  + difficulty balancing work, family, and school demands.

In the table on the next page, come up with at least three problem statements in addition to the example provided. Be creative! Read into the summary above whatever meaning you want. You can add imaginary themes and subthemes to the summary to support your problem statements. You do not need to include everything you observe in the literature as a focus in your problem or thesis statements: Problem statements narrow the research focus.

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| **Potential Problem Statements** |
| Graduate programs may inadvertently erect barriers to student academic and long-term career success by failing to attend to the struggles graduate students experience managing family, work, and other external demands. |
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On the next page, test out the problem statements you created above by coming up with a corresponding research question for each one. This will help ensure that your problem statement actually leads logically to potential research in the topic area. If it doesn’t, then it might still work perfectly well as the thesis for a conceptual argument, but might need to be tweaked for research problem statement. Two examples are provided for the first problem statement. You will likely see overlap between the research questions you generate, or you might find that some could have been derived from more than one of the problem statements.

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| **Potential Problem Statements** | **Research Questions** |
| Graduate programs may inadvertently erect barriers to student academic and long-term career success by failing to attend to the struggles graduate students experience managing family, work, and other external demands. | What do graduate counselling students perceive as barriers to their success within both their own lives and graduate programs?  To what degree are the barriers to success faced by graduate counselling students a result of student factors versus program factors? |
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If you struggled with either part of this exercise, try completing it in the reverse order. In other words, critically reflect on the summary of themes and subthemes in the literature, and then come up with a list of potential research questions. Work backwards from these to create your problem statements.

Finally, reread your problem statements, and imagine writing a paper in another course or a journal article using each of them as a thesis statement. You might need to tweak them slightly, but they should be broad enough to function for both these purposes.