
Guests: Janis Whitlock, Research Scientist – Family Life Development Center, College of Human Ecology; Janis Talbot, Gannett Health Educator; Lilly Robinson, Gannett Health Promotion Assistant; Amanda Messinger, Gannett Health Promotion Assistant; Dane Cruz, Cornell Interactive Theatre Ensemble; Martha Dewey, Cornell Interactive Theatre Ensemble

Upcoming meetings:
Wednesday February 13, 2008  3:30–5:00 p.m.    Friends Hall, Hall of Fame Room
Wednesday April 9, 2008    3:30–5:00 p.m.   Friends Hall, Hall of Fame Room

I. Opening and Welcome – Susan Murphy
A. The Hall of Fame Room in Friends Hall (Annex to Scholkopf Hall) will be our meeting space from today throughout the remainder of the academic year.

B. The focus of today’s meeting will be Gatekeeper Education and Training at the student level.

II. Student Mental Health and Wellbeing at Cornell: Research Findings and Implications - Janis Whitlock, PhD
A. This research focuses on mental health on a broad continuum, rather than on mental illness measures.

B. For our purposes, key points include:
   1. The relationship between academic stress and psychological distress suggests that it might be possible to identify students who are at risk (for distress) and provide them support and education to increase coping ability.
   2. Students turn to friends and parents most often, when feeling sad, anxious or depressed.
      a. This supports our priority for gatekeeper education and training for students, and gatekeeper education/information for parents.
      b. Our focus should include enhancing the links between social network gatekeepers, such as friends and parents, and the institutional gatekeepers such as staff and faculty.
   3. Many students throughout the undergraduate years communicate with their parents on a daily basis.

C. Questions and discussion points from the council members related to the presentation
   1. How does the parental contact affect students’ coping?
      a. What is the effect on development of independence, problem solving and frustration tolerance?
   2. Does the parental contact suggest that students are using this support and not the other supports we offer here on campus?
      a. The level of student/parent communication is a reality AND we need to encourage the use of other resources as well.
      b. Engaging parents to encourage their student to utilize campus resources and to practice self-care activities will be important in our on-going efforts.
   3. Is this communication helpful or hurtful?
a. It would be helpful to have more discussion about the pros and cons of how much students and parents are communicating.

D. For more information about her research and findings, Janis can be contacted by email at: jlw43@cornell.edu

III. Current Strategies for Student Gatekeeper Education and Training - Dean of Students Office of Student Support

A. This office has five Assistant Deans who teach and train students who then go out and share with other students. These students are in formalized organizations whose missions are to provide student-to-student support, through direct service and/or social network opportunities.

B. Representatives from several of these groups presented what their organization does to support student mental health, the training they receive and how their group does outreach.

1. faQ Online
   a. Online, chat-style peer mentoring service for LBGTQ students which reaches students who are not yet talking to their parents (or others) about coming out.
   b. The mentors receive a half semester intensive training on listening skills, empathy, boundaries and online conversing before providing the service. Mentors receive on-going monthly group and/or individual supervision sessions with their advisor (DOS staff member). Other mental health professionals from across campus are brought in to provide topic-based training such as recognizing warning signs of distress and referral resources.
   c. Mentors hold weekly "office hours", or chat times. Utilization has increased this semester as compared with the Spring '07 semester.

2. Asian/Asian-American forum
   a. This group’s mission is to provide education and advocacy around issues that are important to the Asian and Asian-American communities on campus.
   b. They host discussion forums and panels to increase the dialogue within and between communities.
   c. Their advisors (who come from the Dean of Students office and Residential Programs) educate them informally, but they do not receive formalized “training” of any kind.
   d. They do not feel prepared to “assist a peer in distress”.

3. Empathy, Assistance and Referral Service (EARS)
   a. Founded in 1970 and continues with the mission of providing support to individual students and doing outreach to groups in the campus community.
   b. 75-90 hours of highly structure and intensive training over the course of three semesters is required before a student is able to provide individual peer-to-peer counseling in person in the EARS room or over the phone. A skill-building model of training is employed and includes listening skills, how to respond to students dealing with a wide range of stressors and issues, and how, when and where to refer.
   c. In any given academic year there are about 40 fully trained EARS counselors who handle the 700-900 contacts (in person, by phone and outreach workshops) typical in a year. The EARS room is staffed 7 days a week in the late afternoon and early evening hours, while classes are in session. Peer-to-peer counseling sessions are confidential.
   d. These peer counselors also provide workshops to student groups on listening skills, leadership skills, and stress management.

4. Cornell Minds Matter (CMM)
   a. CMM’s focus is on destigmatizing mental illness and help-seeking, and encouraging mental health.
   b. They sponsor and co-sponsor with other organizations, events, discussions and speakers to provide information, education and mental illness/mental health resources.
   c. Their advisor (DOS Assistant Dean and social worker) provides them with training in “How to Help a Friend Who is Depressed” and “Happiness 101-Positivity”. They presented the “How to Help a Friend…” training at a national Active Minds conference in October and will begin presenting this workshop here at Cornell in the Spring '08 semester.

IV. Comments and Discussion

A. Tremendous array of services. Are there connections between these groups and programs?
   1. The staff advisors for these groups have offices in close proximity to each other affording ease of communication and planning for co-sponsorship of programs.

B. Student members shared that they think most students know about EARS, but not much about the other groups who presented today. Students might hear about an activity or event sponsored by one of the other groups, but wouldn’t know or connect it to the group itself.
C. Grad students think EARS is only for undergraduates.
   1. DOS is working on ways to attract graduate students to the EARS training, so that more graduate students might utilize the peer-to-peer counseling service.
      a. The north campus training location might be a deterrent. Providing the training in Hasbrouck or the Big Red Barn might be a place to start.
      b. Training modification for a grad student if they already did the training as an undergraduate might make the time commitment more doable.
      c. It was suggested that the EARS advisor and students approach the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (GPSA) for funding to increase the visibility of EARS training and services specifically for graduate and professional students.
   2. The newly formed Graduate Community Initiative Working Group (GCIWG) will work on multiple program ideas, including recruitment and inclusion of grad/professional students into existing and new peer training and support groups. Gannett, DOS, CURW, RP various professional school student service programs and the GPSA are all invited to participate in this effort. Contact Brenda Wickes (5-5184 or bw32).

D. Beginning list of student groups who could be trained in the gatekeeper education model (submitted after the actual meeting):
   1. Residential Programs student staff
   2. Tatkon Center student staff
   3. Fitness Centers student staff
   4. Greek-life student leaders
   5. Peer mentor/advisors in the colleges
   6. Athletic team leaders

E. Additional comments or suggestions related to today’s topic of Gatekeeper Education and Training for students can be directed to Catherine Thrasher-Carroll (ct265@cornell.edu).

Minutes taken by Catherine Thrasher-Carroll