I. Context for today’s discussion on undergraduate student stress
   A. On the 2006 National college Health Assessment survey, 34% of Cornell University undergraduates said they received a lower grade on an exam/project or course due to stress.
   B. During several recent faculty department presentations on student mental health, faculty members have asked the question, “What can we (as faculty) do to help mitigate student stress?”
   C. Many of us agree that some level of student stress is normal, but wonder what can be done, both inside and outside of the classroom to help minimize unnecessary stress.

II. Faculty panel: Rosemary Avery, Professor Policy Analysis and Management; Anthony Hay, Associate Professor Microbiology; Ken Reardon, Associate Professor City & Regional Planning;
   A. Panelists shared strategies they incorporate into their teaching and/or advising roles to help reduce student stress. Themes and specific activities included the following:
      1. Provide clear expectations from the first day of class
         a. What the students can expect from the teacher
         b. What the teachers expect from the student
      2. Build flexibility into the course
         a. Tell students there will be four exams during the semester, only three will count toward their grade, and they can choose which three.
         b. Have a formal mechanism through which students can appeal project/paper deadlines or ask for a make-up exam.
         c. Rather than setting a make-up exam date & time at the beginning of the semester, provide the make-up exam based on the group of students who have communicated (through the formalized mechanism) that a different/date is needed.
         d. Provide flexibility in office hours
            ▪ Location (your office, via email)
            ▪ Time of day/night
            ▪ TAs hold different office hours than teacher
      e. Have students research and submit exam questions
         ▪ Facilitates the learning
         ▪ Encourages active engagement in the course
         ▪ Creates a sense of faculty/student collaboration
      3. Keep students well-informed of their level of course performance throughout the semester
         a. As the add/drop deadline approaches, it can help decrease students’ stress level to know whether or not they are doing well enough to stay in a course.
4. Learn the students’ names
   a. Take their pictures the first day of class to assist in learning their names. (Even give them extra credit points if you forget their name throughout the semester.)
   b. Give students a first assignment, due on the second class, to bring in a photo of themselves doing something they enjoy.
   c. Post Cornell sports team scores as well as pictures of the teammates who are enrolled in the class.

5. Build community between and among students and faculty within a department
   a. Schedule class field trips
   b. Provide home-cooked dinner at faculty members’ homes
   c. Initiate dinner discussions in the dining halls
   d. Require more group work to decrease individual competition

6. Create early warning systems (within the classroom/teaching experience) to recognize when a student is in distress
   a. Absenteeism
      * Missing 3 classes in a row is a strong indicator that the student may be in trouble.
   b. Use the last 15 minutes of each faculty department meeting to name students of concern, share information, and make a plan for checking in with the students to ascertain what supports might be needed to help them get back on track.

7. Make the grading process as transparent as possible
   a. Grade inflation is a problem.
   b. Mean grading seems to change the feeling (increases level of competition).
   c. Pass/fail for first year students could help level the playing field and decrease competition.

III. Policy Concerns
It was suggested that this council’s Mental Health Policy group and CAPS Operations team address the following subjects at future meetings:

A. The need was expressed for clarification and re-examination of the requirements for a student’s return to campus after a brief psychiatric hospitalization during the semester.
   1. It was noted that sometimes when a student returns to campus after a brief hospitalization they have a recurrence of mental health issues within a few weeks or months.
   2. The protocols of Cayuga Medical Center and of Gannett Health Services in the release of a student after a brief hospitalization are not well known by faculty or student service staff members in the colleges.
   3. Questions regarding the protocol for approving Study Abroad for a student following a return to campus after a brief hospitalization were also raised.

B. Additionally there was an expressed need for clarification between the college’s role and the role of Gannett Health Services when a student returns from a mental health-related leave of absence.

IV. Concern Regarding CAPS Ability to Respond to Increasing Demands
A. Given the increases in clinical demand, one council member wondered if there is a need for more clinical staff at Gannett.
   a. The telephone triage system allows students to speak with a therapist, usually the same day they call.
   b. Two full-time positions are now dedicated to Community Consultation and Intervention (CCI) for faculty and staff to receive support in assisting a student in distress.
   c. Gannett’s CAPS is one of the most well-resourced college counseling centers in the country with over two dozen clinicians for our student population of approximately 20,000 students. Many college and university counseling centers are operating at a significantly higher student to counseling staff ratio. Nonetheless, during peak periods students may need to wait 2-3 weeks to be seen by a counselor (following the phone triage) for non-emergency appointments.

V. Need for Reward System for Faculty Advising and Mentoring
A. The conflict between publishing and good advising and teaching needs to be more seriously considered.
   1. Faculty members enjoy the advisor and mentor roles but do not receive sufficient training, encouragement or reward for developing these skills.
   2. Creation of a faculty advising standard with monitoring was discussed.
      a. An advising standard would need to be addressed during recruitment, hiring and promotion.
- Must be part of the reward structure.
- A preparation program on advising/mentoring could be offered for new faculty.
- A mechanism could be developed for tallying/summarizing the number of hours a faculty meet with students during the semester/academic year.
- Students could be polled each year about their advisor/mentor experience.

B. Student members of the council expressed that they want to have a good faculty advisor or mentor experience as part of their Cornell education.

VI. Closing remarks
   A. Great conversation with important points raised.
   B. Topic will be revisited in the fall.
   C. Adjourned for the summer.

Minutes taken by Catherine Thrasher-Carroll