MINUTES
October 6, 2008

Attending: Casey Carr, Amanda Carreiro, Derek Chang, Janet Corson-Rikert, David DeVries, Betsy East, Kathy Edmondson, Greg Eells, Kappy Fahey, Kathryn Gleason, Linda Grace-Kobas, Mary Beth Grant, Tanni Hall, Christine Holmes, Anne Lukingbeal, Tim Marchell, Polina Minkin, Susan Murphy, Andy Noel, Brendan O’Brien, Bethsabe Romero, Maryam Sajed, Lisa Shaffer, Janet Shortall, Linda Starr, Catherine Thrasher-Carroll, Don Viands, Tow Yau

Guests:

Upcoming meetings:
November 17, 2008; Spring ’09-TBD

I. Welcome and Introductions – Susan Murphy
   A. This council is a cross section of faculty, staff and students who come together to explore the question, “What can we do as a community to improve the overall campus environment in order to positively affect student mental health?”
      1. The charge to the council is “…[to be] responsible for studying the campus environment in order to advise the Provost and the Vice President on opportunities for reducing risks and increasing support for members of the Cornell community facing mental health challenges.”
   B. President Skorton continues to promote the idea of Cornell as a Caring Community throughout many of his public addresses.
   C. Proactive/prevention strategies, as well as crisis intervention approaches are needed.
      1. A list of things faculty members can do to help reduce student stress came out of the April 2008 CMHW meeting where a panel of faculty members shared some of their “best practices”. This list can be accessed by going to the Gannett homepage and clicking on the “learn more” link in the section on the lower right corner entitled “Assisting Students in Distress”.

II. Orientation/Review for New and Continuing Members – Tim Marchell
   A. Mental health is a community issue
      1. It affects everyone directly or indirectly.
      2. Everyone has a potential role to play in creating a supportive environment and identifying students in distress.
      3. Clinical services are necessary yet not sufficient to meet all the needs.
   B. Goals Set by Council Fall 2006
      1. Identify as many seriously distressed individuals as possible.
      2. Provide support or treatment for as many of these individuals as possible.
      3. Increase support for students from high-risk groups.
      4. Provide early support for students to minimize the severity of problems.
      5. Reduce the onset of mental health problems.
      6. Support faculty, staff, and students affected by individuals with mental health problems.
   C. Existing structures for addressing campus mental health
      1. The Executive Committee on Campus Health and Safety oversees the work of and receives recommendations from:
         a. Council on Mental Health & Welfare and the President’s Council on Alcohol and Other Drugs
      2. The Alert Team
         a. Created three years ago
b. Coordinates communication and institutional response among key staff regarding students whose behavior is of concern

3. Mental Health Policy Group
   a. An outgrowth of the Alert Team
   b. Venue for discussing common “best practices” being employed across the colleges
   c. Identifies gaps in existing systems/policies or practices
   d. Makes recommendations to the Associate Dean’s group

4. Mental Health Research Group
   a. Janis Whitlock, Research Scientist Family Life Development Center, College of Human Ecology is a key member.
   b. Her research informs us that when students are in distress they turn to their parents and their peers first for support, advice and guidance.

5. Student Mental Health Education Group
   a. Dean of Students/Gannett collaboration focusing on educational strategies for students that mirror the central messages given in faculty/staff programs, yet are framed in terms of student needs.

D. Community Mental Health Education
1. Everyone in the community can benefit from awareness education including:
   a. Signs of distress
   b. Self care/ stress management
   c. Where to turn for help (campus resources)
2. Mental Health Education “campaign” roll out Spring 2009
   a. Awareness programs to include:
      i. Handbook for faculty (followed by resources for staff, parents, and students)
      ii. Mental Health Edu, an online program for faculty and staff on how to identify students in distress (tentative)
      iii. Student education presentation – “How to Help A Friend”
   b. Basic Skill Building Program on talking with students in distress
      i. “Notice and Respond” DVD workshop for faculty and for staff
      ii. 90 minutes
      iii. Vivian Repta from Cornell interactive Theatre Ensemble (CITE) will co-facilitate with Gannett personnel or other student services staff from across campus during pilot phase in winter ’08-’09
      iv. A train the trainer program is being planned to establish a cadre of presenters for this program.

III. Discussion – Tim Marchell posed questions; Council Members responded
A. What should our priorities be for this year?
1. How to best disseminate information to faculty (e.g. ways faculty can reduce student stress)
   a. This type of “best practices” information will be included in the faculty handbook
   b. Ask Associate Deans to spread the information to faculty
      i. Email: A number of suggestions were offered at a recent CMHW meeting, consider how you might incorporate into your teaching practices.
      ii. Include a link to the Assisting Students in Distress site, role-of-faculty section
   c. Ask the new Center for Teaching Excellence to have the information accessible
d. TAs need to receive this information as well
2. The advising system is not consistent across colleges, programs
   a. There is a disparity of experience among students
   b. Inadequate acknowledgement or reward for faculty who do this well
   c. Directors of Graduate Study (DGSs) and Directors of Undergraduate Study (DUSs) are a group of student support staff who could use more support themselves in these unique roles.
3. Make recommendations to colleges that are re-vamping their student evaluation of faculty.
   a. Consider including some new questions like, “Do you feel you knew where you stood grade-wise throughout the course?”
4. Graduate and Professional students
   a. The Graduate Community Initiative (GCI) work is ongoing and we should be part of it. There is a natural intersection between the GCI and the work of the council.
   b. There is a need for looking at how the existing structures can better support and assist graduate and professional students, as well as undergrads.
5. Issues of mental health of the faculty
B. Which focus do we want to have for this year’s council meetings?
   1. Explore ways to systematize and move forward with some of the suggestions that came out of the faculty panel from last spring’s (April 2008) meeting.

IV. Notice and Respond Initiative
   A. While everyone on campus needs to have a basic awareness of the signs of distress and available resources, a subset of the total population need to have the confidence and skills to have a conversation with a distressed student.
   B. The Notice and Respond DVD is an educational tool within a workshop format. It is designed to provide community members with a model of an effective conversation with a distressed student, where severity of distress level is discerned, resources are offered, a boundary is set with regard to role and expertise, and groundwork is laid for a discussion of “next steps” with workshop participants.
   C. Council members viewed the staff version of the DVD
   D. Initial reactions included:
      1. Powerful scene; well done
      2. The workshop content that leads participants into viewing the scenario needs to emphasize that this is one of several response options; that everyone is not going to feel comfortable to have this kind of conversation with a distressed student.
      3. Many faculty members, especially in the smaller colleges or departments already engage students in the way demonstrated in the scenario and these folks will need to know “what to do next”.
      4. It was suggested that administrative assistants to professors would be a group that would benefit from this program as they are the ones receiving late assignments, relaying requests for extensions or special accommodations and often are faced with distressed students.
         a. A consideration when proposing this group receive this training program is to communicate that no one is saying assisting students in distress should be a written part of the job description for these administrative assistants.
         b. Rather than having a direct conversation with a distressed student, another option would be to call someone else (supervisor, department chair, student support office, Gannett, or CUPD) and relay your concerns in order to minimize students “falling through the cracks”.
      5. The inclusion of the faculty or staff member in the scene knowing his own limitations re: complex emotional issues and setting a boundary with the student on this will be an important learning objective for the program.

Minutes taken by Catherine Thrasher-Carroll