MINUTES
March 25, 2009

Attending: Joe Burke, Casey Carr, Amanda Carreiro, Janet Corson-Rikert, Greg Eells, Kappy Fahey, Mary Beth Grant, Christine Holmes, Kent Hubbell, Anne Lukingbeal, Tim Marchell, Alan Mathios, Susan Murphy, Andy Noel, Barry Perlus, Lisa Ryan, Lisa Shaffer, Janet Shortall, Catherine Thrasher-Carroll, Don Viands, Brenda Wickes, Tow Yau

Guests: Rachel Bukberg, Jenna Marshall, Mary Gilliam, Alice Green, Jayson Jones, Holly Lau, Young Suh, Jan Talbot, Kris DeLuca, Jayasri Srinivasan

Upcoming meetings:
Fall ’09-TBA

I. Welcome and Introductions – Susan Murphy

A. Today’s agenda began with updates on:
   1. The Meinig Family Cornell National Scholar’s project
   2. The Faculty Handbook
   3. Gatekeeper Initiatives

B. The main focus was the student perspective on academic-related stress.
   1. Student panel
   2. Discussion

II. The Meining Family Cornell National Scholar’s Project – Kris DeLuca

A. This project was a follow up to discussions at previous CMHW meetings re: academic-related stress.

B. The current freshman research project involved looking at how students experience stress related to academic advising programs.
   1. Six categories representing various aspects of advising have been investigated:
      a. FACULTY PERSPECTIVE (includes training, structure, relationship building, communication style)
      b. STUDENT PERSPECTIVE (advertising/education, knowledge of difference between faculty advisor and academic advisor; possibly relationship building, communication style)
      c. ADMINISTRATIVE PERSPECTIVE (time, merit, evaluation)
      d. COMPARISON WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS
      e. MATCHING TO ADVISORS (changing, specialty advising [i.e., pre-med, pre-law, etc.], undecided)
      f. ALTERNATIVES TO ACADEMIC ADVISING (i.e., peer advising)
   2. Presentation and dinner - Wednesday April 15th, 5pm
      a. All council members are invited to attend.

III. Faculty Handbook – Kent Hubbell and Casey Carr

A. Spearheaded by the Office of the Dean of Students, there has been input from numerous sources across the university, making this a community-wide effort.

B. Two of the three sections are complete. The third section should be complete by the end of this academic year and ready for distribution Fall ’09.
C. An innovative distribution idea has surfaced: have students deliver the handbooks to faculty.
   1. Cornell Minds Matter students and Meinig Scholars might choose a number of faculty they know to deliver to, along with written talking points on the importance of and how to use the new handbook.
   2. Handbooks will also be distributed at presentations on mental health at faculty department meetings.

IV. Gatekeeper Initiatives – Tim Marchell

A. Efforts to prepare students, faculty and staff to recognize signs of distress and to respond effectively have been ongoing.

B. One of the newer initiatives, the Notice and Respond DVD/Workshop was piloted December 2008 followed by a soft roll out across campus this Spring semester 2009.
   1. Program evaluations have been overwhelmingly positive.
   2. Eleven programs encompassing 16 workgroups have been done.
   3. Current challenge is how to reach faculty audiences within the 1 ½-2 hour timeframe of the program.
   4. Contact Tim Marchell or Catherine Thrasher-Carroll if interested in scheduling this program for your office or department.

C. The Office of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs Graduate Mentors were trained and began providing 20-30 minute presentations on the following during the Spring ’09 semester:
   1. Alcohol Poisoning & Medical Amnesty
   2. How to Help A Friend (mental health)

V. Academic-Related Stress– Student Panel and Discussion Themes
(PANELISTS: Mary Gilliam-EARS/EMPATHY, Assistance and Referral Service; Jayasri Srinivasan – Post Doc and recent CU Graduate Student; Jayson Jones-CMM/Cornell Minds Matter; Holly Lau-CMM; Young Suh-CMM)

A. Advising in general (undergrad)
   1. Often times students feel that their assigned faculty advisor relationship is not as effective as it might be.
   2. Some students who do work with their faculty advisor feel “bad” asking for their advisor’s time because the advisor seems so busy.
   3. Sometimes it takes several attempts to find the “right” advisor. Sometimes a student finds that multiple faculty advisors/mentors is what meets their needs.
   4. Students who utilize the academic advising office in their college find these advisors very helpful.
   5. Peer advisor programs and advising offices within the colleges are structured in ways that support the relationships.

B. Faculty advisor relationship (graduate student)
   1. Some advisors are well-meaning, but they don’t seem to understand the importance of the time it takes for the grad student to complete the program.
   2. One of the biggest challenges for grad students is organizing and progressing forward with the unstructured set of tasks and projects that make up their program.
      a. Grad students need someone to help them negotiate and navigate deadlines and to constructively discuss what is and is not working.
   3. Many graduate students are international students which bring up another layer of considerations. It would be helpful for the faculty advisor to be mindful of:
      a. VISA and Green Card issues, especially related to funding changes.
      b. Family and child care choices.

C. Assigned faculty advisors vs. finding one’s own faculty advisor (undergrad)
   1. Some students do not know how to seek the “right” advisor for themselves.
   2. Some students feel intimidated to initiate an advisor/advisee relationship with a faculty member.

D. Components of “good” faculty advising relationship (undergrad)
   1. The faculty member initiates communication at the beginning of the academic year
      a. Students feel that an introductory email would go a long way in establishing a good advisor/advisee relationship
   2. Good listening skills
   3. Availability
   4. Recognizing distress and connecting student with resources if needed
5. Helping students understand options in given field

E. Course stress
1. There are some professors who may be great in their field, but teaching is not their forte.
   a. Clear expectations at the beginning of the course are very helpful.
   b. Teach by explaining concepts you want students to understand.
   c. Learn students’ names

2. Competition creates isolation
   a. Foster an attitude of learning in order to increase knowledge, rather than one about getting ahead of everyone else.
   b. A class roster helps students get to know each other.
      • Have students address each other by name.
   c. Have students meet in to smaller discussion groups.
   d. Group projects can promote cooperation rather than competition, and represents how students will need to work when they leave Cornell.
   e. Demonstrate that you want the students to do well in the course. Structure the class for student success.
      • Avoid making statements like, “a sixth grader could do this”
      • Avoid creating exams which result in a mean grade of 30% or 40%
      • Print out lecture slides
      • Have a manuscript of lectures on Blackboard so students can stop taking notes and enjoy the class.
      • Sometimes when students speak up in class, it can feel scary. It is important that they hear acknowledgement and respect for their contribution.

3. Students would like faculty to remember that they are dealing with much more than academics and that these things are important too.
   a. On and off-campus non-academic activities help students develop a sense of connectedness and meaning, as well as improve time management skills and increase productivity when they get back to academic work.
   b. Add/Drop deadlines, housing lottery, finding roommates all increase student stress, so don’t schedule exams at the same times that these are occurring.

4. For actual text from the Cornell Minds Matter “Causes of Academic Stress: An Informal Sampling of Student Concerns” document, please see the accompanying pdf file.

VI. Closing comments – Tim Marchell

A. The purpose of these conversations is to increase awareness of current issues so each of us in our respective domains can reflect on ways to affect changes for the betterment of our campus community.
   1. It is interesting to note the convergence of ideas expressed by today’s student panel with that of the faculty panel a few meetings ago on the topic of academic-related stress.
   2. Our question for the upcoming academic year: Are there ways we might concretely move forward?

B. Our next meeting will be early in the Fall ’09 semester.

Minutes taken by Catherine Thrasher-Carroll