MINUTES
Monday, February 25th, 3:00pm-4:30pm
Hall of Fame Room, Friends Hall

Attending: Joe Burke, Casey Carr, Janet Corson-Rikert, Linda Croll Howell, Deborah Durnam, Betsy East, Kathy Edmondson, Robin Hamlisch, Didi Etim, Kappy Fahey, Natalie Finn, Kathryn Gleason, Mary Beth Grant, Tanni Hall, Kevin Hallock, Kent Hubbell, Monica Jones, Janna LaMey, Tim Marchell, Alan Mathios, Celia Muoser, Susan Murphy, Saadiya Mutawakil, Kirsten Post Eynav, Lisa Ryan, Lisa Shaffer, Janet Shortall, Catherine Thrasher-Carroll, Don Viands, Elise West, Wai Kwong Wong, Chloe Lincoln, Kathy Zoner, Beth Taplitz, Kathleen Long, Mirinda Martin, Joe Bergen, Angela Falisi

Upcoming meetings:
Monday April 15, 2013 -- 3:00-4:30 pm. Hall of Fame Room Schoellkopf Annex

I. Welcome and Introductions: Susan Murphy
   A. Today’s session focuses on Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and how we can better support students who may fall on the spectrum. The language around ASD is changing. The diversity of neuroscience is an aspect of diversity that needs to be included in our efforts to promote inclusion of all. Without realizing the effect, the environment that we create on campus can make it difficult for students who fall somewhere on the spectrum.
   B. There will be a presentation by Dr. Lauren Kenworthy, followed by a panel discussion.

II. Presentation Title: Autism Spectrum Disorders: Cognitive Strengths and Weaknesses and Improving the Fit with College

   Speaker: Dr. Lauren Kenworthy, Director of the Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders, Associate Professor at the George Washington School of Medicine

   Review the complete PowerPoint presentation.

III. Presentation overview
   A. For students who fall on the Autism spectrum, there are two cognitive areas that look like learning disabilities: Executive Functions (control carrying out goal-directed behaviors efficiently) and Social Interactions.
   B. People on the spectrum are less likely to be cognitively flexible and well organized.
   C. In college, the demands are high and the integration of a variety of cognitive and social factors is critically important, but something that students on the spectrum struggle with.
   D. Additionally, students on the spectrum don’t do as well with the new and unfamiliar.
E. On the other hand, these students have unique strengths that can be extremely beneficial to obtaining a college degree:
   1. a profound patience for details
   2. mastery of large datasets
   3. high level of respect for others and for rules

F. What can we do to help students on the spectrum who often times miss the big picture and/or experience as sense of overload?
   1. Think in terms of “universal design” or best practices in general, that will help everyone in the class.
      a. Transparent (clear, accurate, detailed) syllabus
      b. Safe person or a coach
      c. Breaks when needed
   2. Addressing Cognitive inflexibility
      a. Important to note that inflexibility can be adaptive. It is easy for students on the spectrum to get overloaded and the cognitive inflexibility helps to manage that.
      b. It is possible to manage in/flexibility with specific interventions. Routines are particularly helpful for people on the spectrum.
      c. Cognitive flexibility is more costly for people on the autism spectrum. It is more difficult for them to move with the flow.
   3. Social Cognition
      a. Drawing meaning from social interactions is more difficult for people on the spectrum.
      b. Students may require more explicit support, and may need more help finding their ‘people’ and places where they feel comfortable socially.

IV. Celebrate Neurodiversity
   “I believe those of us with Asperger’s are here for a reason” – John Elder Robison
   A. What does it mean?
      1. Recognizing that accommodations are a civil right
      2. Expanding the notion of equality
      3. Focusing on climate change- there is a need to improve the fit for students in the college setting
   B. Other considerations:
      1. Don’t forget the parents: In most cases, the parents know what works best for the student. Engaging with them is important, even when students are in college.
      2. Educate faculty and staff (eg. Creation of a committee/working group)
      3. Must be a university-wide integrated effort
      4. Openness to learning/teaching accommodations (recall: best practices that benefit all students)
         a. The kind of teaching that helps students on the spectrum, help all students
      5. Recognize that there are many simple interventions that can have big effects. (eg. Notes available for courses)
   C. Final thoughts: When we work together, it is a ‘win-win’ setting for both parties involved.
V. Panelist Introduction and Opening Comments

**Topic:** “Welcoming Neurodiversity in College/at Cornell”  
**Moderator:** Kappy Fahey. Director, Student Disability Services  
**Panelists:** Robin Hamlish (Counselor, CAPS), Cliff Kraft (Faculty Member, Natural Resources), Michele Fish (Associate Director, Student Disability Services), Alicia Torres Ramirez (Faculty Member, Food Science), Tommy Murphy (Senior, Ithaca High School, Advocate for ASD), Kathy Gleason (Faculty Member, Landscape Architecture)

A. Robin Hamlisch, Counselor at CAPS, discussed what is being done in CAPS, and future directions.
   1. Interest in serving students who may or may not identify as on the spectrum (those who self-identify versus those with a formal diagnosis).
   2. Individual Therapy is available to students, and noted that falling on the spectrum is not viewed as a mental illness.
   3. Possibility of Group Therapy (could partner with CMM, SDS, Deans to develop support/social skills groups), which could benefit all students.
   4. Possibility of making the Health Entrance Document more specific for students on the spectrum – to get resources and info to them more directly.

B. Cliff Kraft, Professor in Natural Resources, discussed his relevant personal experience working with students who fall on the spectrum.
   1. Concern with labels: Group question and discussion: Is the label absolutely necessary?  
      a. Some students prefer not to take on that label, but it is often difficult to connect them with services. There is a need to create more campus wide communication about resources available to students who may fall on the spectrum, whether or not they have a labeled diagnosis.
   2. Need to improve the university environment  
      a. Noted that some faculty members, staff members, departments will never be part of the discussion  
      b. There is a need to target specific departments and create occasions for faculty members to discuss this topic in a formal setting.

C. Michele Fish, Associate Director, Student Disability Services, works directly with students who identify on the spectrum and disclose their situation with the office.
   1. The office uses forms to gather information about the students in order to get them the appropriate support and accommodations.

D. Alicia Torres Ramirez, Professor in Food Science, worked with a student on the spectrum.
   1. Had a student who struggled with a course she taught, specifically its group structure. Other students in the class were uncomfortable with this student. Prof. Torres Ramirez realized that she wanted to help more. She tried to accommodate as much as she could, by selecting groups and by putting the student with others who would be more sensitive. Initially, it was a struggle to get the student registered with Student Disability Services. But, once the student was registered, many of the difficulties in the classroom setting began to get resolved.
   2. Recommends a working group among faculty to provide support for each other and to provide answers to difficult questions when dealing with similar situations. It would also
serve as an opportunity to brainstorm ‘best practices’ to help and support students in the classroom.

E. Tommy Murphy- Senior, Ithaca High School and has been living with Asperger’s for 9 years and has worked as an advocate for 2 years.
   1. Shared a number of helpful ideas to implement: explicit instructions in paper form, a good space to sit (by the door), a quiet dorm room, a good quiet library, and a strong support staff.

F. Kathy Gleason- Faculty, Landscape Architecture and has a son who has Asperger’s
   1. As a parent and professor at Cornell, she notes that she is working on incorporating her son’s experience into her teaching and finds it easier to recognize and engage with students on the spectrum.
   2. Recommends the opportunity for stability, particularly the option to maintain housing from year to year, rather than switching every year. This is something that may be exciting for other students, but can impose unnecessary stress on students who fall on the spectrum.

VI. Group Discussion
   A. How can we create that open environment for students on the spectrum?
      1. Question from the group: According to the current pedagogical model (learning structure) of engaged learning, in small groups, with a lot of interaction, how does that fit with serving students on the spectrum?
         a. It is easier for students if rules are explicitly spelled out. There is a need to recognize that everyone can play a different role. It helps to give the student a specific job in collaborative settings.
      2. Question: What to do if the student is undiagnosed? Recognition of the struggle between labeling and not labeling so that processes and support are in place.
         a. Comment: There is a need to build the education and awareness, particularly among the faculty. Also there is a need to access faculty members who care.
         b. Suggestion: Formation of a committee
      3. Janet Corson- Rikert commented that one way to identify students on the spectrum could be through the Health History Form completed by all incoming students, in addition to including a letter that describes the support options available.
      4. Kathleen Long, Professor in French, commented on the issue of being overly protective with students, and instead focusing on providing support to allow them to explore beyond their comfort zone in a safe environment.
      5. Kent Hubbell commented on the possibility to revisit the faculty and staff handbooks that were created and distributed a few years ago and the opportunity for this to be an initiative among interested faculty members.
      6. Susan Murphy added that Kappy Fahey’s Student Disability Services’ Advisory Group can serve as a forum to further discuss this topic and to sort out the practical aspects of providing support, with topical expertise present.
      7. Celia Muoser, student representing Cornell Minds Matter, added that this discussion can also help students who don’t officially fall on the spectrum and help facilitate connections during freshman year. She noted the importance of pairing students with committed and informed faculty advisors.
      8. Wai Wong, Assistant Director for Community Based Services, CAPS, emphasized the importance of de-stigmatizing and normalizing autism spectrum disorders, through student input and participation. He commented that Cornell Minds Matter could be an effective vehicle for this effort. Wai further emphasized that supporting students with autism
spectrum disorders is a matter of diversity and that it is necessary to focus on it as a civil right, not a disability.

a. Kathleen Long added that she spoke with a student who said that she feels that it is more stigmatizing to be labeled as autistic, than to admit that she was in a psychiatric facility.

9. Kathy Zoner, Chief of CUPD, noted that there has been a strong movement to educate the police about mental health and that when students feel discomfort with another student, they often turn to CUPD. CUPD often sees the behavioral complaints that come from a lack of knowledge about autism spectrum disorders. She views this as an opportunity to partner with campus resources to take a more holistic approach.

10. In closing, Susan Murphy added that as this topic is discussed further, Cornell Minds Matter and partnership among faculty is crucial.

Minutes taken by Angela Falisi (alf78)